西の善き魔女 外伝

The Good Witch of the West

The Good Witch of the West and the Brave King of the East,
calling up a wise man and a poet, and then visiting an icy city.
It is over when the midday star falls.
Who is standing behind you ? ...then

原作○荻原規子
漫画○桃川春日子

I'M A HERETIC-
LET ME GO!
I DON'T CARE!
I DON'T CARE IF YOU'RE A HERETIC-- I STILL...
...LOVE YOU.

AAAH!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
THAT'S YOUR LATEST WORK!
IT'S OVER FOR EVANGELINE ...
Sigh...

VINCENT ?!
IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME, ADALE.
WHY ARE YOU HERE IN THE ROLAND HOUSEHOLD? AND THOSE CLOTHES..
OH, YOU DON'T THINK THEY SUIT ME?
OF COURSE THEY DON'T!
YOUR RANK IS FAR ABOVE MINE!
YOU'RE A PRINCESS OF THE DACTINE, ONE OF THE LESSER ROYAL HOUSES!

BE THAT AS IT MAY, YOU HAVEN'T WRITTEN ANYTHING IN AGES, ADALE.
I WANTED TO SEE IF THE FIREBIRD'S FEATHER WAS REALLY CAUSING YOU TROUBLE...
...SO I SNUCK OUT OF SCHOOL!
I'M EVANGELINE'S BIGGEST FAN!
THEY THINK I'M HOLED UP IN MY ROOM, WORKING ON A PAPER.
VIN-CENT...

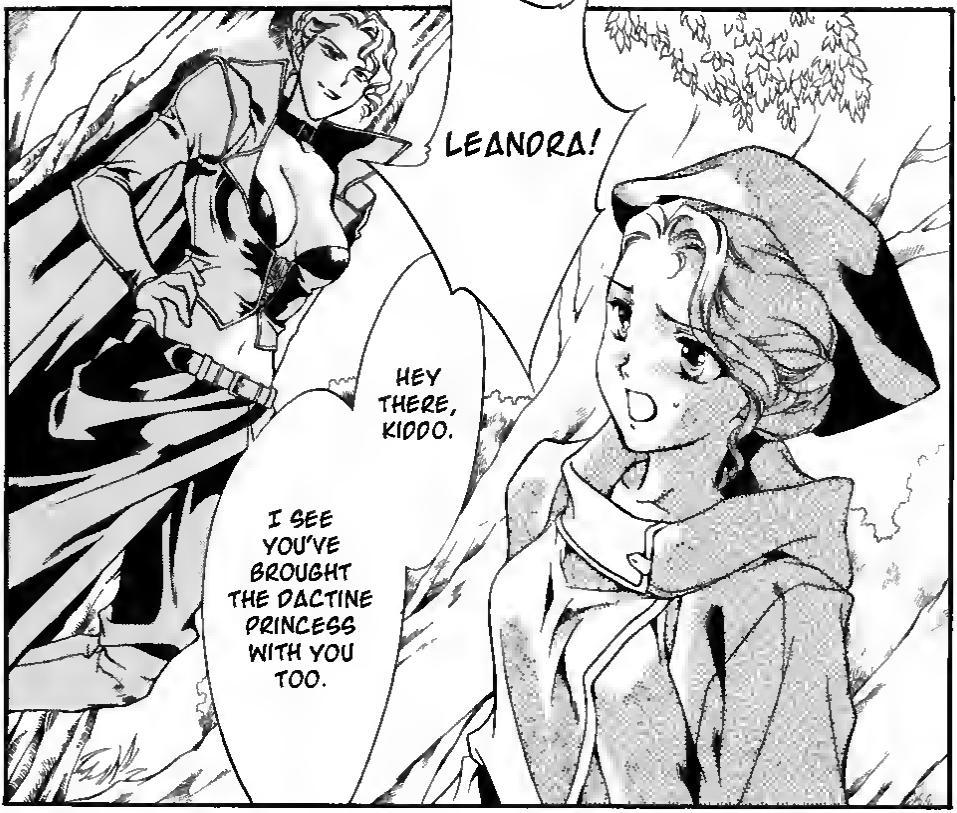
OH... I SEE.
SO FIRIEL HAS GONE SOUTH TO CHASE RUNETTE?
THAT'S RIGHT.
SHE AMAZES ME...
THERE'S NO GUARANTEE SHE'LL EVER FIND HIM...
...YET SHE'S RISKING HER LIFE BY GOING TO THE DRAGON FOREST.
THE BONDS THAT BIND THE ROYAL FAMILY MEAN NOTHING TO HER.
AND THEN LOOK AT ME...
AT THIS VERY MOMENT, MY LORD BROTHER IS OFF FIGHTING DRAGONS FOR MY SAKE...
...BUT ALL I CAN DO IS SIT HERE AND WAIT, LIKE THE GOOD LITTLE GIRL THE CONSERVATIVE NOBLES WANT.

I'M MOST EFFECTIVE AT BEING A PRETTY PRINCESS, THE ONE EVERYONE WANTS TO HELP.
HOW WELL I KNOW IT!
YOU CAN'T HELP IT.
THAT'S SOMETHING YOU'RE VERY GOOD AT.
BUT...
...WHEN I LOOK AT FIRIEL, MY CHARACTERS SEEM...
I'D GIVEN UP ON REALITY AND RETREATED INTO THE WORLD OF FANTASY...
...BUT SHE SURPASSES ANY FANTASY I COULD THINK OF.
SHE'S MORE ALIVE THAN ANY STORY I'VE EVER IMAGINED.

THEY ARE SO...
...COLOR-LESS NOW.
RUNE, FIRIEL ...
EVEN MY LORD BROTH-ER...
WHEN CONTRASTED AGAINST THE STORIES OF THE PEOPLE WHO ARE LIVING AND FIGHTING RIGHT NOW...
...THOSE I CREATE JUST CAN'T COMPARE.

WE'RE HERE.
AND THIS IS...?
ASCHERTON.
LEANDRA'S BUILT A TRAINING GROUND HERE TO HELP FIGHT BRIGION.
LEANDRA?!
THE FIREBIRD'S FEATHER, THE TRIAL THAT THE QUEEN GAVE YOU BOTH, IT SAID THAT...
"WHOEVER STOPS THE INVASION OF THE EASTERN EMPIRE OF BRIGION IN THE NAME OF THE GOOD WITCH OF THE WEST SHALL BECOME QUEEN."
LEANDRA'S TRYING TO DO IT HER WAY--STOPPING THEM WITH FORCE.

WHY AM I DRESSED LIKE A MAN?
YOU'RE THE CONSERVATIVE FACTION'S PRINCESS.
YOU CAN'T HAVE THEM THINKING YOU'RE DIRECTLY INVOLVED WITH MILITARY MATTERS, RIGHT?
FIRST, YOU MUST "KNOW THINE ENEMY."
WHAT KIND OF BOW IS THAT?! I'VE NEVER SEEN A DESIGN LIKE IT.
IT'S POWERFUL AND ACCURATE.
A SPLENDID WEAPON, YES?
EVEN A WOMAN COULD DEFEAT HER ENEMIES WITH IT.


LEANDRA!
HEY THERE, KIDDO.
I SEE YOU'VE BROUGHT THE DACTINE PRINCESS WITH YOU TOO.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF MY MEN?

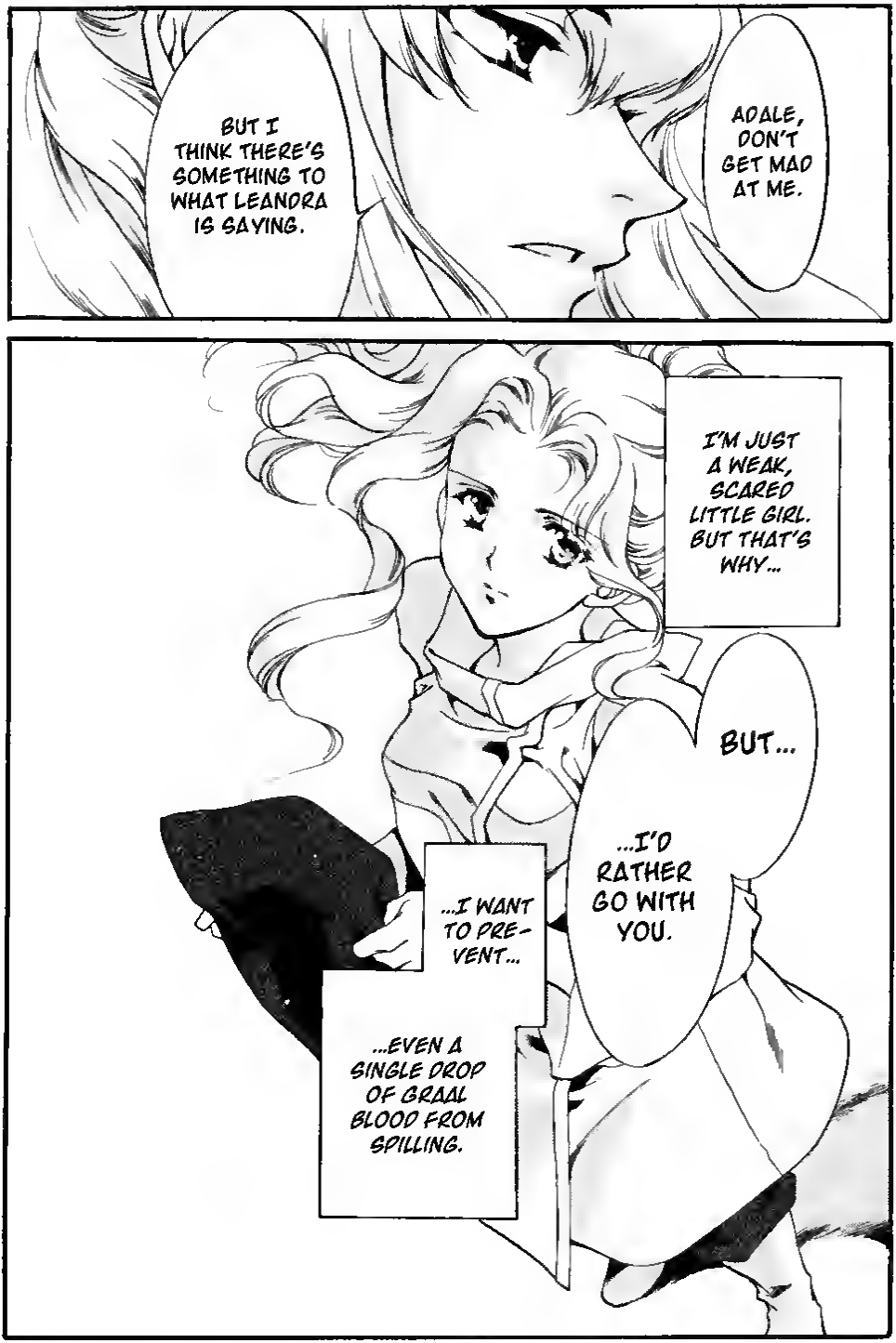
IF THEY INVADE TOLBAT, THE NEXT COUNTRY THEY'LL HIT WILL BE GRAAL.
...USED A NEW WEAPON CALLED "GUNPOWDER" TO UNITE THE EASTERN NATIONS IN ONLY A FEW SHORT YEARS.
ESCRADOS, EMPEROR OF BRIGION ...

THE FOOT-STEPS OF WAR...
...ARE ALMOST AT OUR DOOR THE DAYS WHEN SWORDS AND SPEARS WERE USED ONLY TO FIGHT DRAGONS, WHEN WE COULD GET BY WITH PEACEFUL DIPLOMA-CY--
THOSE DAYS ARE OVER!
ANYBODY WITH EYES TO SEE CAN TELL YOU CON-SERVATIVES ARE GOING TO RUIN OUR NATION.

ぎゅっ
EVEN SO...
...I'M GOING TO STOP BRIGION IN A DIFFERENT WAY.
NO MATTER WHAT, WAR MEANS KILLING.
EVEN THE BEST WEAPON IS STILL JUST A TOOL FOR TAKING SOMEONE'S LIFE.

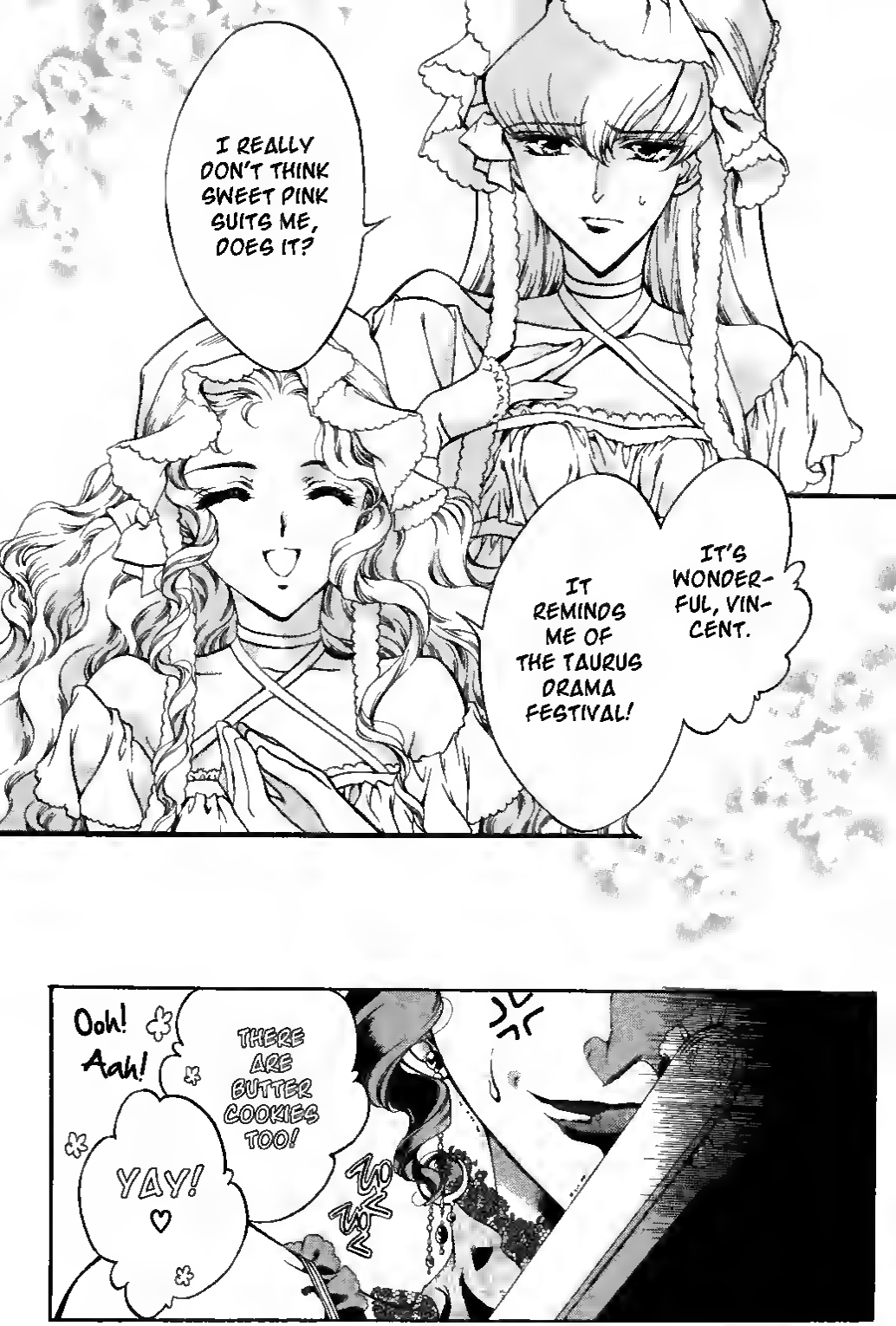
FOR 900 YEARS, WE'VE KEPT THIS COUNTRY SAFE USING A WOMAN'S CHARMS, NOT MILITARY FORCE.
THAT IS THE PRIDE OF THE GOOD WITCH OF THE WEST, AND I'M GOING TO CARRY IT ON!

I'M GOING TO TOLBAT.
THAT'S IT!
I'M GOING TO MAKE A PEACE TREATY BETWEEN BRIGION AND TOLBAT!
I DON'T LIKE WEAPONS
I DON'T LIKE BLOOD OR PAIN, EITHER.
OR WAR.
OR SWEATY SPORTS.
YOU CAN'T STOP ME.
THEN... I'M GOING TOO.


ADALE, DON'T GET MAD AT ME.
BUT I THINK THERE'S SOMETHING TO WHAT LEANDRA IS SAYING.
I'M JUST A WEAK, SCARED LITTLE GIRL. BUT THAT'S WHY...
BUT...
...I'D RATHER GO WITH YOU.
...I WANT TO PREVENT...
...EVEN A SINGLE DROP OF GRAAL BLOOD FROM SPILLING.

WAR IS A MAN'S LOGIC.
BUT WE'RE FROM THE COUNTRY OF THE GODDESS.
WE CAN'T RESIST THEIR LOGIC OF WAR WITH FORCE OF OUR OWN.
WE NEED TO USE A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT APPROACH.
THAT'S EXACTLY RIGHT!

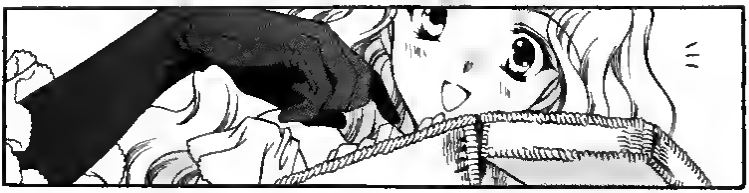
I'LL DRIVE OFF THE FOOT-STEPS OF WAR!
I'M GOING TO TOLBAT!
NOW IS NOT THE TIME...
...TO JUST BE THE CON-SERVATIVE PRINCESS WHO SITS AND PRAYS.
THAT'S MY EVANGELINE!

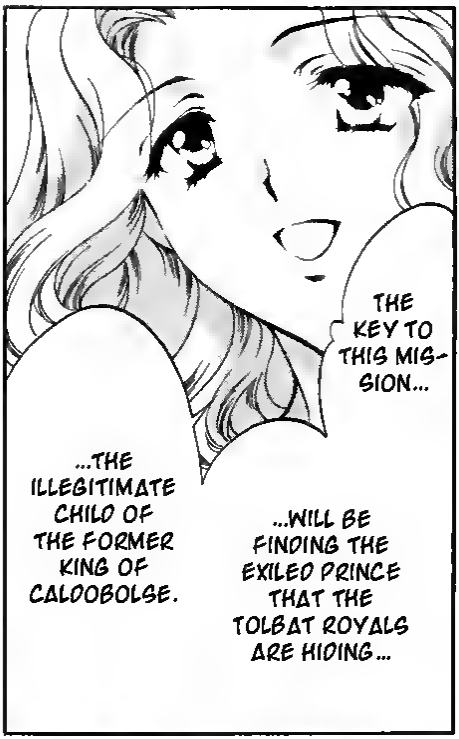

I REALLY DON'T THINK SWEET PINK SUITS ME, DOES IT?
IT'S WONDER-FUL, VIN-CENT.
IT REMINDS ME OF THE TAURUS DRAMA FESTIVAL!
Ooh!
Aah!
THERE ARE BUTTER COOKIES TOO!
YAY!

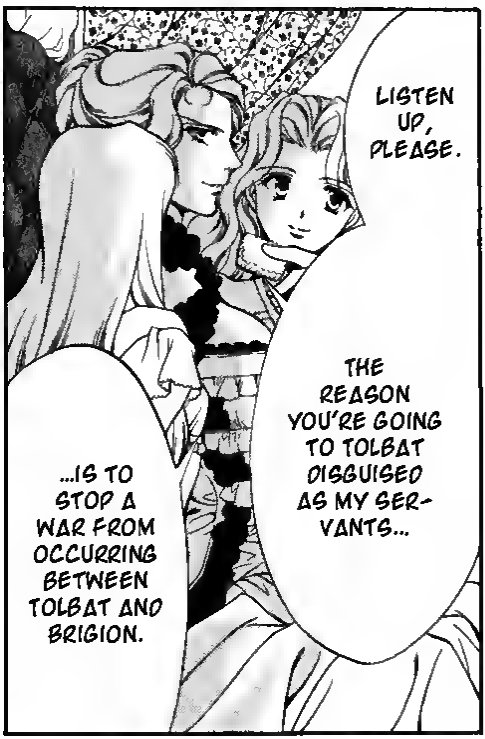
I'M SO SORRY, CECILIA.
WE HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN OUR MISSION.
IT'S JUST THAT WE WERE RAISED TO LIVE IN THE ROYAL PALACE, AND WE'VE NEVER BEEN ON A LONG JOURNEY LIKE THIS.
PRINCESS VINCENT WAS BORN *IN* THE PALACE!
I UNDERSTAND HOW THEY FEEL...

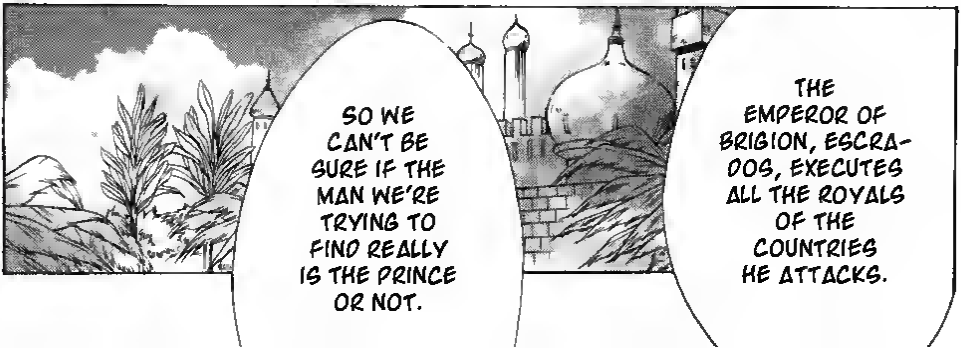
ADALE ROLAND IS A CANDIDATE TO BECOME STAR QUEEN.
VINCENT CLEMENCIA DACTINE IS THE ONLY DAUGHTER OF THE...
..."HOUSE OF THE GODDESS," A FAMILY OF LESSER ROYALS WHO'VE BEEN HIGH-RANKING PRIESTS FOR GENERATIONS.
YOU COULD SAY THAT THEY HAVE THE NOBLEST BLOOD IN ALL OF GRAAL...
THIS JOURNEY TO ANOTHER COUNTRY, DISGUISED AS SER-VANTS...

...IS LIKELY TO BE THE LAST TIME IN THEIR LIVES THAT THEY'LL TRULY BE FREE.



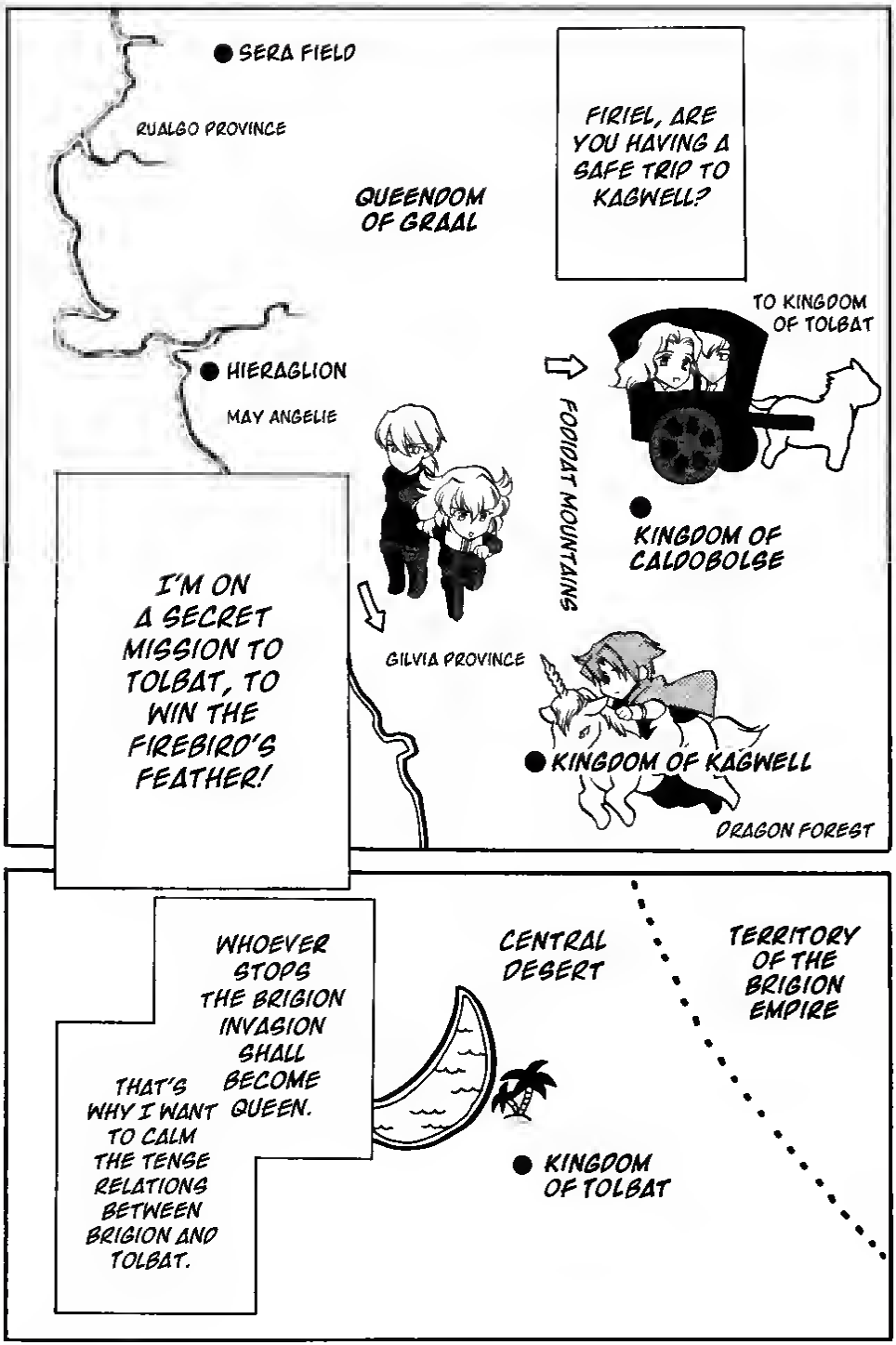

THE KEY TO THIS MISSION...
...THE ILLEGITIMATE CHILD OF THE FORMER KING OF CALDOBOLSE.
...WILL BE FINDING THE EXILED PRINCE THAT THE TOLBAT ROYALS ARE HIDING...


LISTEN UP, PLEASE.
THE REASON YOU'RE GOING TO TOLBAT DISGUISED AS MY SERVANTS...
...IS TO STOP A WAR FROM OCCURRING BETWEEN TOLBAT AND BRIGION.


SO WE CAN'T BE SURE IF THE MAN WE'RE TRYING TO FIND REALLY IS THE PRINCE OR NOT.
THE EMPEROR OF BRIGION, ESCRADOS, EXECUTES ALL THE ROYALS OF THE COUNTRIES HE ATTACKS.

BRIGION CLAIMS THAT IF TOLBAT HANDS HIM OVER, THEY WON'T ATTACK.
"EZRET"?
HIS NAME IS RUSSELL EZRET.
HE'S BEEN STAYING IN THE TOLBAT PALACE FOR FOUR MONTHS.
THE NAME COMES FROM THE EZRET GANG.
IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE, BUT HE WAS RAISED AMONG A GROUP OF MERCENARIES!
THE EZRET ARE THE RIDERS OF THE CENTRAL DESERT.
THE PEOPLE OF CALDOBOLSE BECAME MERCENARIES TO EVADE THE EMPIRE'S PURSUIT!

IS IT HELPING YOUR CREATIV-ITY?
OH, VINCENT!
Oh...?
.....
WHAT A WILD LIFE HE MUST HAVE LED.
LOOK.
WE ARE HERE, LADIES.
THE JEWEL OF THE CENTRAL DESERT--THE OASIS KINGDOM OF TOLBAT.

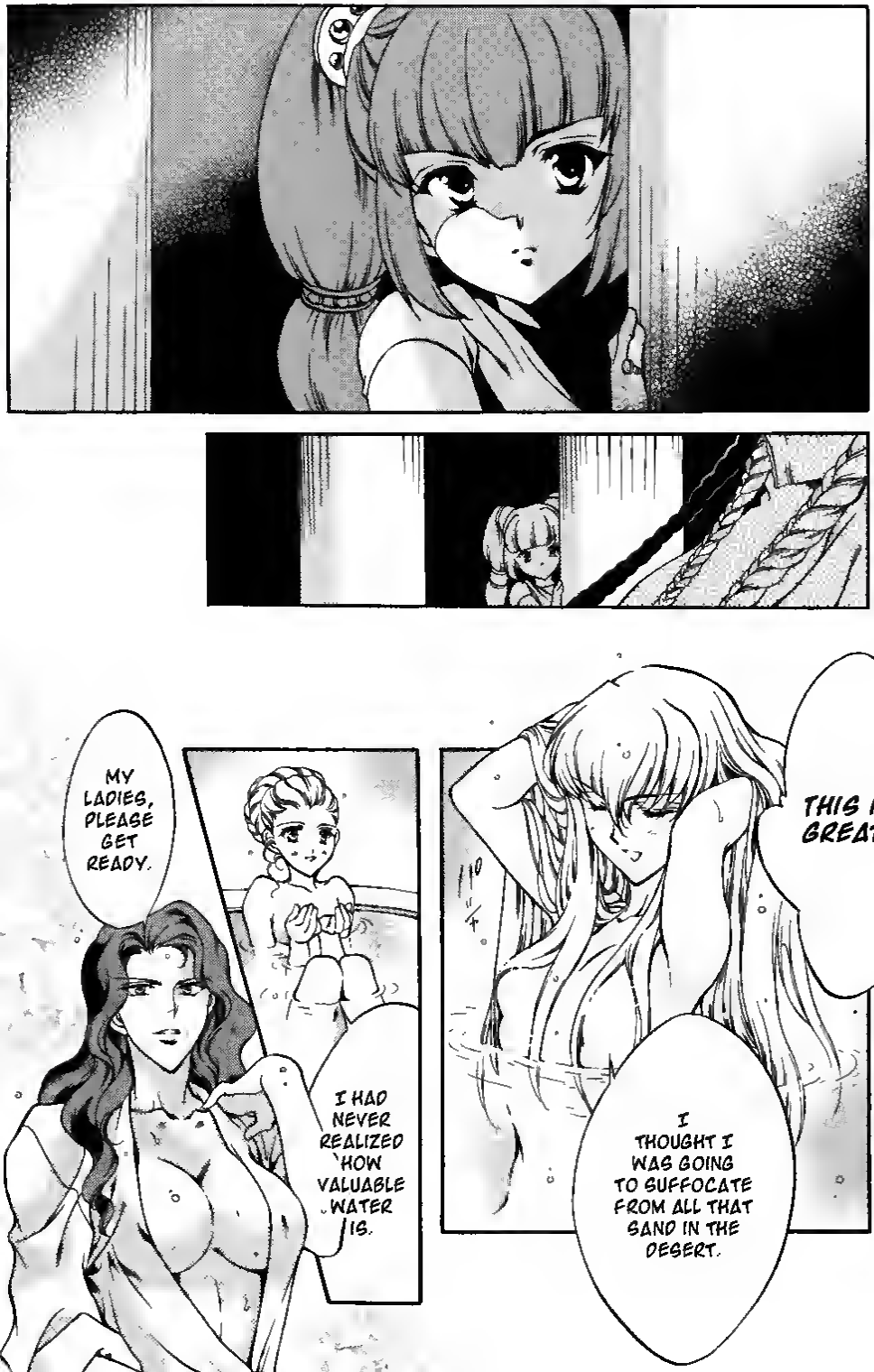

SERA FIELD
RUALGO PROVINCE
QUEENDOM OF GRAAL
FIRIEL, ARE YOU HAVING A SAFE TRIP TO KAGWELL?
TO KINGDOM OF TOLBAT
HIERAGLION
MAY ANGELIE
FODIDAT MOUNTAINS
KINGDOM OF CALDOBOLGE
I'M ON A SECRET MISSION TO TOLBAT, TO WIN THE FIREBIRD'S FEATHER!
GILVIA PROVINCE
KINGDOM OF KAGWELL
DRAGON FOREST
WHOEVER STOPS THE BRIGION INVASION SHALL BECOME QUEEN.
THAT'S WHY I WANT TO CALM THE TENSE RELATIONS BETWEEN BRIGION AND TOLBAT.
CENTRAL DESERT
TERRITORY OF THE BRIGION EMPIRE
KINGDOM OF TOLBAT

I WON'T LET LEANDRA BECOME QUEEN AND TURN GRAAL INTO A BATTLEFIELD!
I CAN'T BE LIKE YOU...
...BUT I'M GOING TO DO EVERYTHING I CAN.
I BID YOU GREET-INGS...
...GUESTS FROM DISTANT GRAAL.
THE NATION OF TOLBAT WELCOMES YOU!

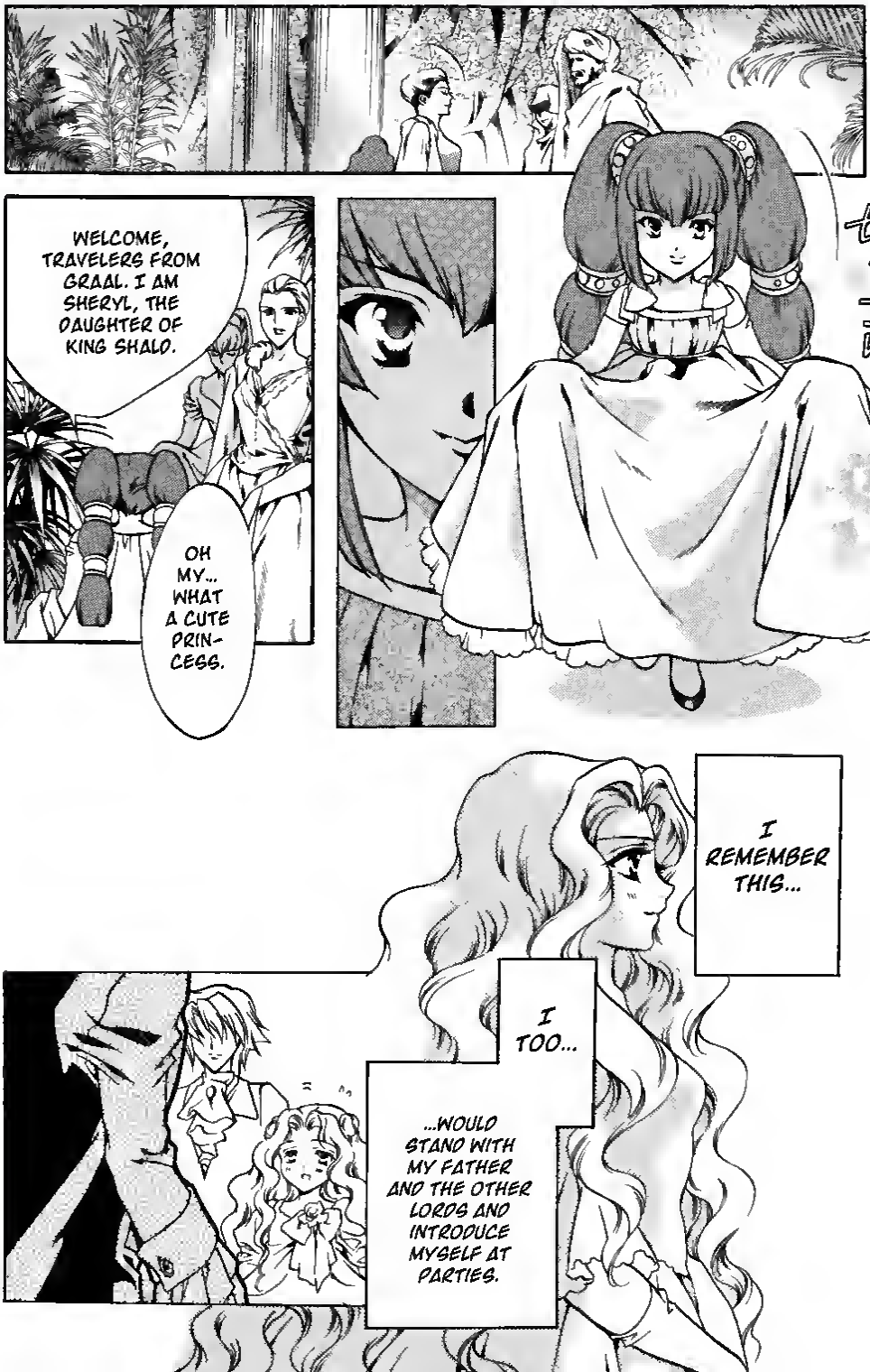
FIRIEL...
WE BOTH CARRY THE BLOOD OF THE STAR QUEEN.
...I WAS ALWAYS JEALOUS OF YOUR FREEDOM.
YET YOU HAVE SUCH AN EARNEST, STRAIGHT-FORWARD HEART, FIRIEL. NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS, YOU NEVER STOP.

I AM HONORED, FOREIGN MINISTER.
WITH SUCH A BEAUTIFUL AMBASSADOR...
...TONIGHT'S WELCOME PARTY IS SURE TO BE SPLENDID.
OH!
HIGH PRIEST MELIADES!
THE KING SO WISHES THAT YOU'LL DO HIM THE HONOR OF A SPECIAL RELIGIOUS SERVICE.
WELCOME! THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR COMING!
THE HIGH PRIEST IS THE HEAD OF A STRICT LORELAIN MONASTERY.

THE RELIGIOUS SITUATION HERE IS A LITTLE COMPLI-CATED.
TOLBAT USED TO WORSHIP OTHER GODS, LIKE THE REST OF THE EASTERN NATIONS.
BUT PRINCESS LILYSET OF GRAAL...
...WHO MARRIED INTO THE TOLBAT ROYAL FAMILY, TURNED MORE THAN HALF THE COUNTRY INTO WOR-SHIPPERS OF ASTRAEA.
TO OVER HALF THE POPULATION, A PERSONAL SERVICE WITH THE HIGH PRIEST IS THE GREATEST HONOR IMAGINABLE.
SO THAT EXPLAINS ALL THE SPECIAL TREAT-MENT.
WE BOTH WORSHIP ASTRAEA, BUT I DON'T MUCH CARE FOR THE LORELAIN FACTION.
THEY'VE GOT SO MANY STRICT RULES...
...BUT YOU WONDER HOW MUCH THEY REALLY FOLLOW ALL THEIR OWN HIGH AND MIGHTY SERMONS.


MY LADIES, PLEASE GET READY.
I HAD NEVER REALIZED HOW VALUABLE WATER IS.
I THOUGHT I WAS GOING TO SUFFOCATE FROM ALL THAT SAND IN THE DESERT.
THIS IS GREAT!

STAY ON YOUR GUARD.
LISTEN UP, PLEASE.
FROM NOW ON, YOU ARE MY SERVANTS. ADDIE AND VI.
I'M GOING TO SAY HELLO TO THE MEMBERS OF THE TOLBAT ROYAL FAMILY.


WELCOME, TRAVELERS FROM GRAAL. I AM SHERYL, THE DAUGHTER OF KING SHALD.
OH MY... WHAT A CUTE PRIN-CESS.
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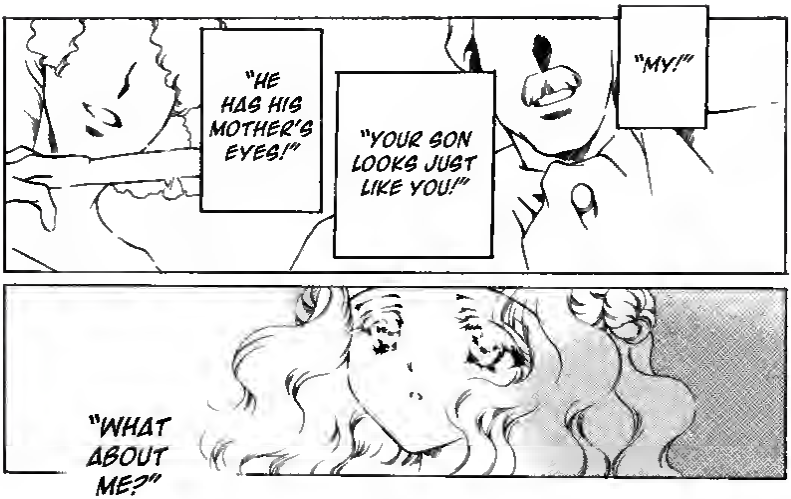
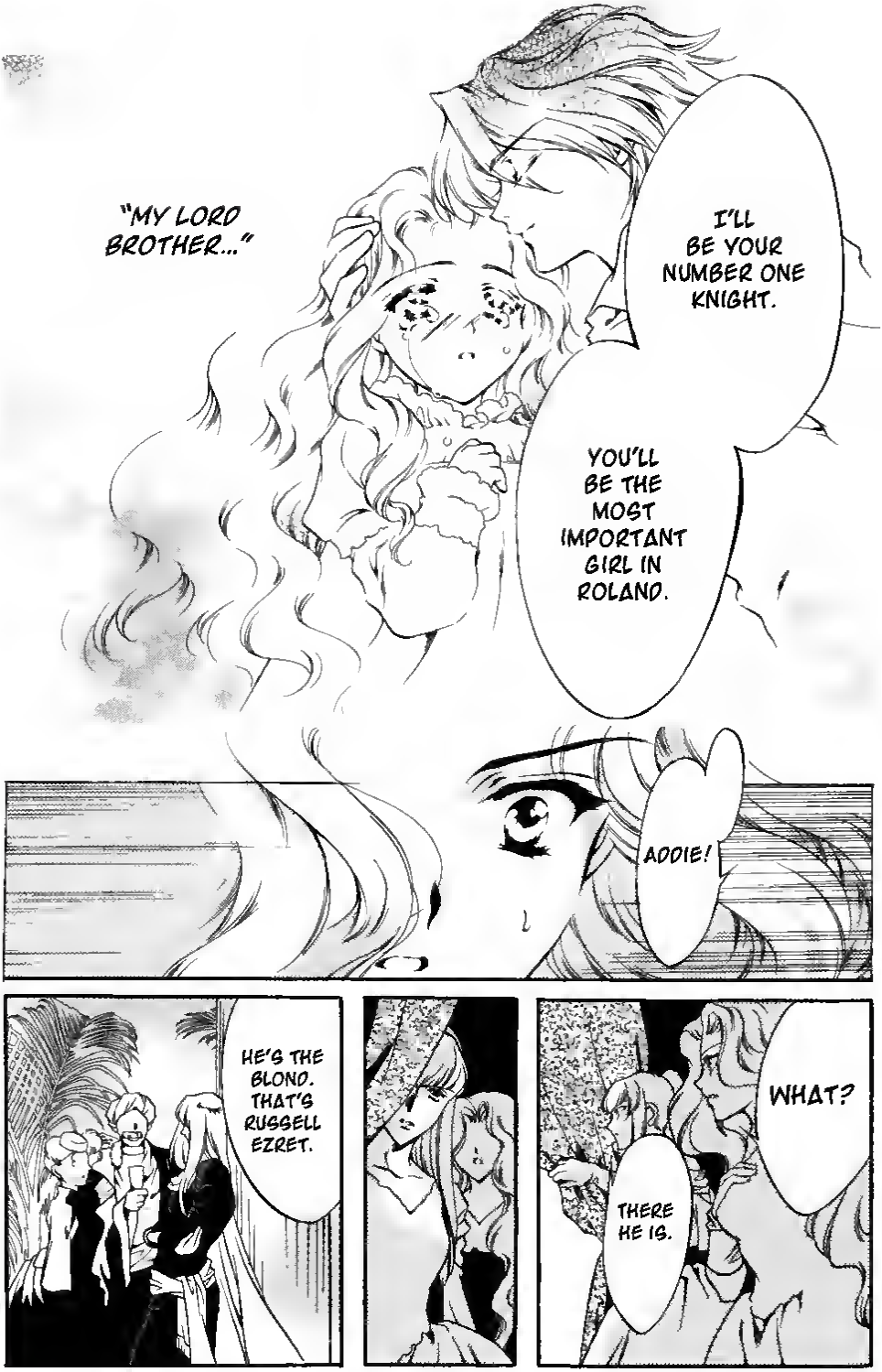
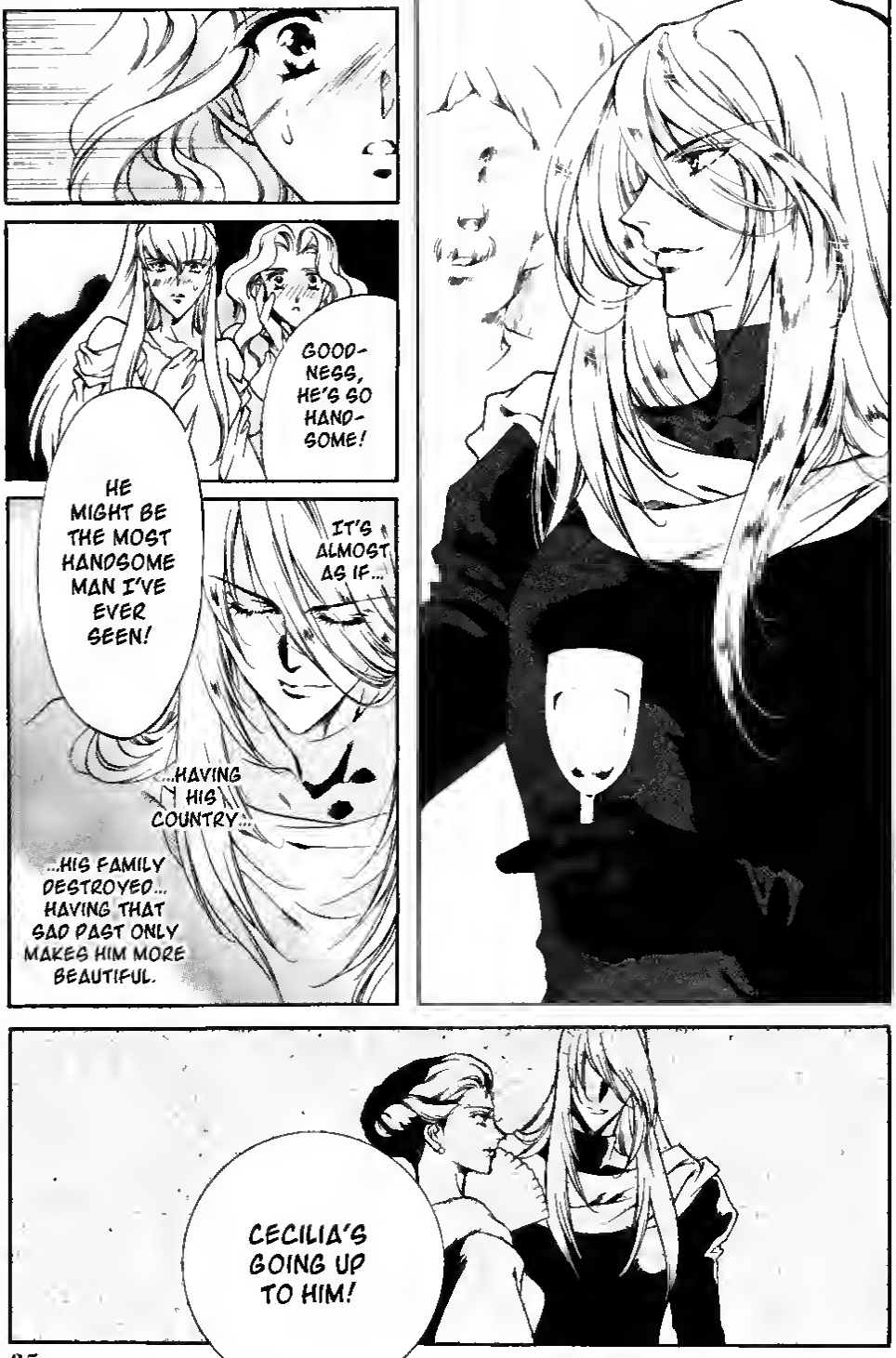
I REMEMBER THIS...
I TOO...
...WOULD STAND WITH MY FATHER AND THE OTHER LORDS AND INTRODUCE MYSELF AT PARTIES.


"HE HAS HIS MOTHER'S EYES!"
"YOUR SON LOOKS JUST LIKE YOU!"
"MY!"
"WHAT ABOUT ME?"

Sniff... Sniff...
"I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO DOESN'T LOOK LIKE EITHER MOM OR DAD..."
THAT DOESN'T MATTER!
"...BECAUSE I'M NOT THEIR REAL DAUGHTER..."


"MY LORD BROTHER..."
I'LL BE YOUR NUMBER ONE KNIGHT.
YOU'LL BE THE MOST IMPORTANT GIRL IN ROLAND.
ADDIE!
HE'S THE BLOND. THAT'S RUSSELL EZRET.
WHAT?
THERE HE IS.


GOOD-NESS, HE'S SO HAND-SOME!
HE MIGHT BE THE MOST HANDSOME MAN I'VE EVER SEEN!
IT'S ALMOST AS IF...
...HAVING HIS COUNTRY...
...HIS FAMILY DESTROYED... HAVING THAT SAD PAST ONLY MAKES HIM MORE BEAUTIFUL.
CECILIA'S GOING UP TO HIM!

MY NATION WAS CONQUERED WHEN I WAS THREE.
LIFE AMONG ROUGH MERCENARIES IS THE ONLY LIFE I KNOW.
HONESTLY, I CAN'T WAIT TO GET BACK INTO THE DESERT.
OH MY!
.....
YOU'RE NOT THINKING OF RESTORING YOUR COUNTRY?
I WAS SENT TO TOLBAT AS AN AMBASSADOR, AND I STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND. THE TOLBAT ROYALS ARE SHREWD BUSINESSPEOPLE.
WHY HAVEN'T THEY HANDED YOU OVER TO THE EMPIRE?
YOUR LIFE IS A PAWN IN A GAME BETWEEN NATIONS.
I'M AWARE.
BARONESS...
...YOU'RE REMARKABLY STRAIGHTFORWARD FOR A GRAAL WOMAN.

...SHOULDN'T STAY HERE TOO LONG.
SOMEONE LIKE YOU...
MISS ...
PRINCESS SHERYL.
HEY, YOU'RE A PRINCESS TOO, RIGHT? FROM THE DACTINE FAMILY?
WHY ARE YOU PRETENDING TO BE A POOR SERVANT GIRL?

THE ALABASTER PALACE AND TEMPLE...
ーヤリ!
...ARE NOT AS WHITE AS THEY APPEAR.

YES!
YOU WISH TO KNOW IF THE PERSON YOU CARE FOR IS SAFE?

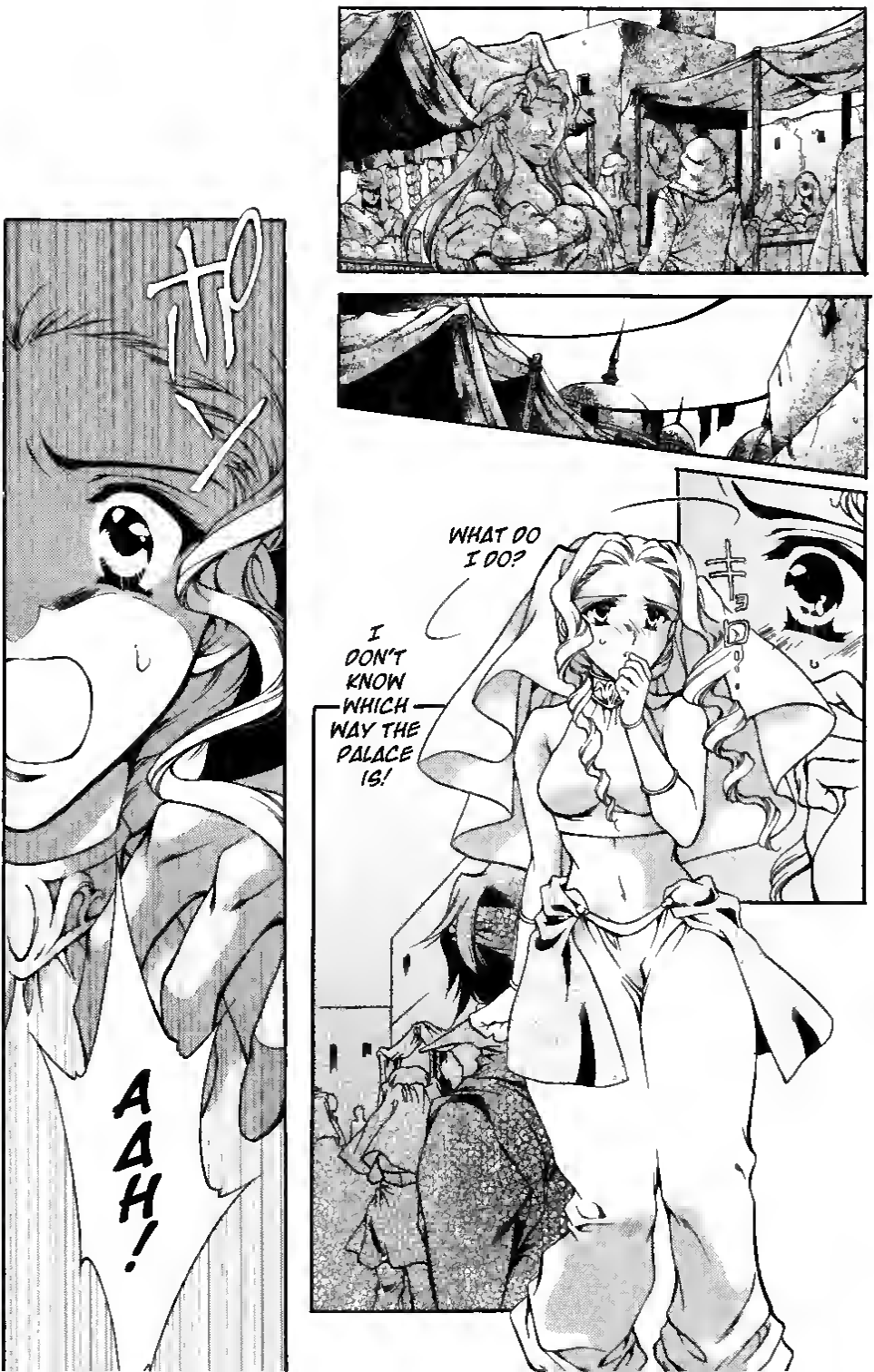
RUNE!

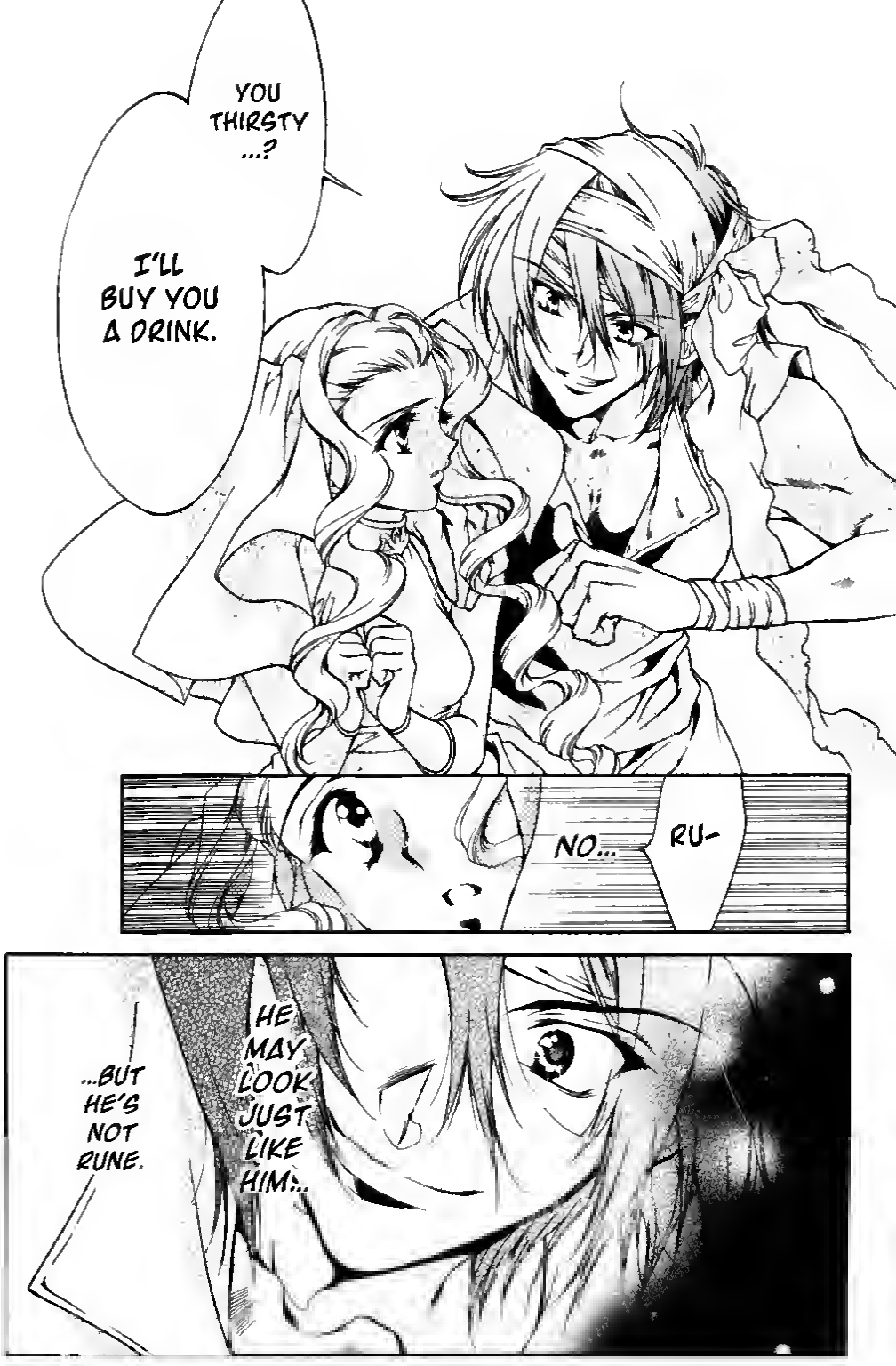
PRINCESS ADALE SNUCK INTO TOWN?!
WHAT WOULD A WORSHIPPER OF ASTRAEA WANT WITH THAT PLACE?!
SHE WANTS TO SEE THE TEMPLE OF THE HOLY CHILD
"I WANT TO SEE IT, JUST ONCE!"
ONCE SHE GETS AN IDEA IN HER HEAD, SHE JUST DOESN'T LISTEN.
SOME-TIMES...
...I JUST DON'T KNOW WHAT NOBLES ARE THINKING.

AMELIA?
IT'S FINE, CECILIA.
SHE WENT WITH YOUR COUSIN. THEY SAID THEY'D BE BACK BY SUNDOWN.
ADALE KNOWS WHAT SHE'S DOING.
YOUR COUSIN MARRIED INTO THIS COUNTRY AND IS SERVING IN THE COURT, ISN'T SHE?
AND WE DON'T KNOW IF THE COURT ITSELF IS SAFE, ANYWAY.
THERE MUST BE A SPY ON THE AMBASSADORIAL STAFF.
THE TOLBAT ROYAL FAMILY KNOWS WHO WE ARE.
AMELIA, HUH?
IF ADALE IS WITH HER, IT'LL PROBABLY BE ALL RIGHT...

HEY, YOU'RE A PRINCESS TOO, RIGHT?
FROM THE DACTINE FAMILY?
WHY ARE YOU PRETENDING TO BE A POOR SERVANT GIRL?
WE HAVE TO FIND OUT WHERE PRINCESS SHERYL LEARNED THAT.

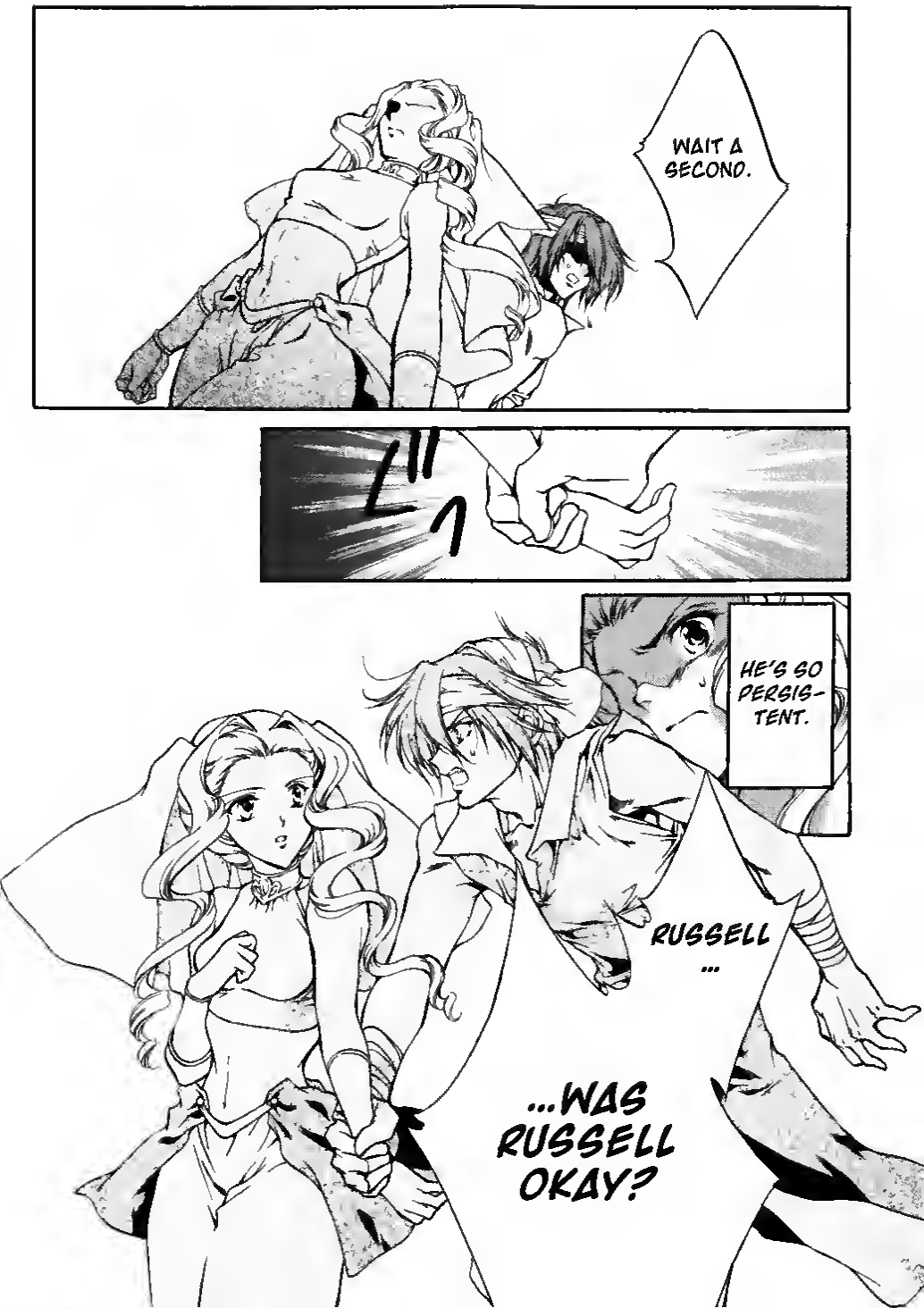
タタッ
HA...
I CAN'T BELIEVE RUNE'S OUT HERE!
OH NO! I'VE GOTTEN SEPARATED FROM AMELIA!
HOW SAD...
...HE DOESN'T KNOW FIRIEL FOLLOWED HIM SOUTH.
THAT MUST MEAN...


WHAT DO I DO?
I DON'T KNOW WHICH WAY THE PALACE IS!
AAH!


YOU THIRSTY ...?
I'LL BUY YOU A DRINK.
NO...
RU-
...BUT HE'S NOT RUNE.
HE MAY LOOK JUST LIKE HIM...

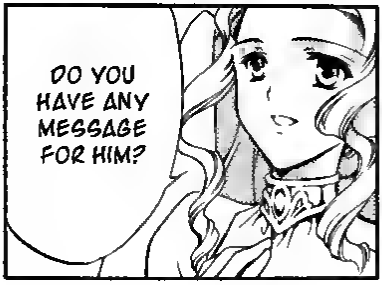
NO, THANK YOU!
SURE, BUT...
...THE PALACE IS THE OTHER WAY.
YOU WEREN'T FOLLOWING ME?
I MISTOOK YOU...
...FOR SOMEONE ELSE. PLEASE EXCUSE ME!
HOW...
...DID YOU KNOW I CAME FROM THE PALACE?
'CAUSE YOU'RE FROM GRAAL, RIGHT?

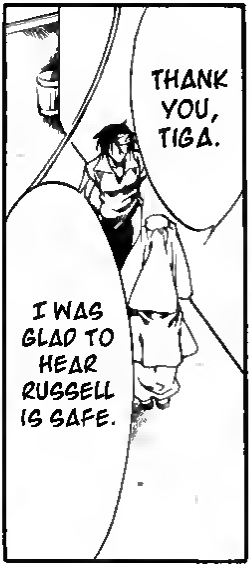
I SAW ALL THOSE CARRIAGES GOING INTO THE PALACE YESTERDAY.
AND I GOT A GLIMPSE OF YOUR FACE THEN.
MY NAME'S TIGA.
IF YOU'D LIKE TO LOOK AROUND, I KNOW THE STREETS AND ALLEYS OF ALGRAT LIKE THE BACK OF MY HAND.
I SAID I WAS FINE!

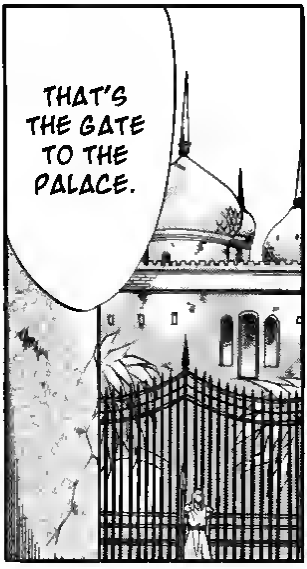

WAIT A SECOND.
HE'S SO PERSIS-TENT.
RUSSELL ...
...WAS RUSSELL OKAY?

YOU...
...KNOW RUSSELL EZRET?

THE OTHER MERCE-NARIES WILL BE GLAD TO HEAR IT TOO!


DO YOU HAVE ANY MESSAGE FOR HIM?


THANK YOU, TIGA.
I WAS GLAD TO HEAR RUSSELL IS SAFE.


THAT'S THE GATE TO THE PALACE.

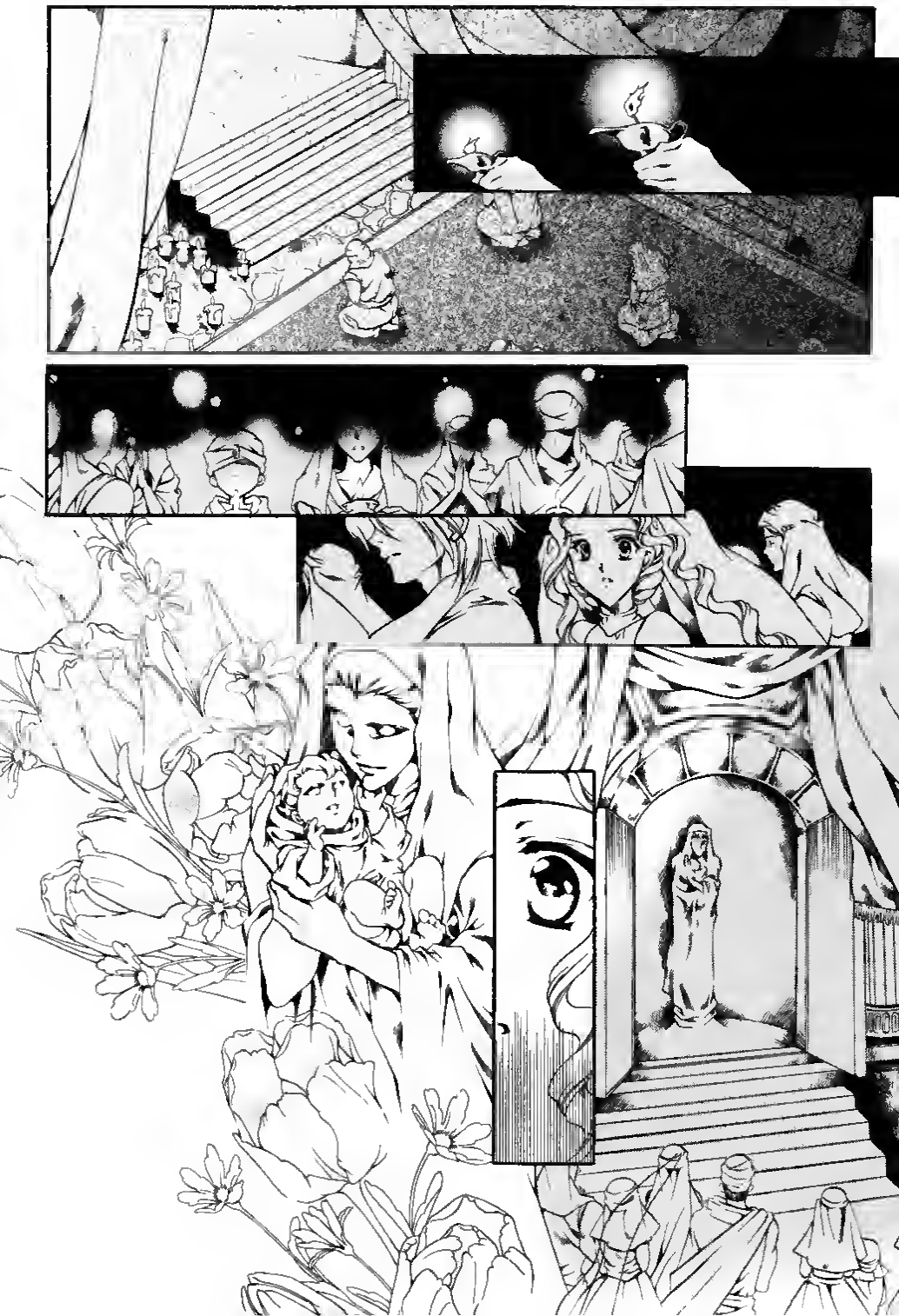
A MES-SAGE, HUH?
.....!
HMM...CAN YOU WAIT A SECOND? I'LL WRITE A LETTER.
I WANT YOU TO GIVE IT TO HIM.
IT'S SOMETHING YOU DON'T WANT ME TO READ, ISN'T IT?
Oh!
IS IT A LOVE LETTER?
UM, DO YOU EVEN KNOW WHAT A LOVE LETTER IS?

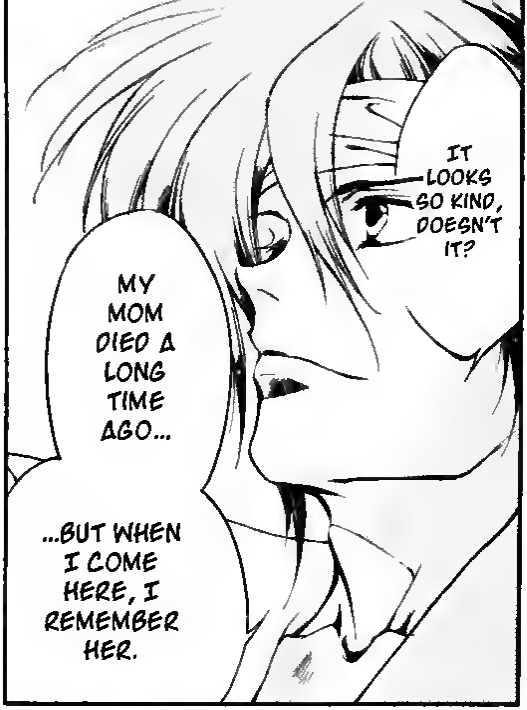
AND AMELIA'S PROBABLY ALREADY GONE HOME, RIGHT?
I KNOW HOW TO GET BACK TO THE PALACE NOW.
YOU KNOW ...
...THERE IS A PLACE I'D LIKE TO GO.
I'LL NEVER GET ANOTHER CHANCE LIKE THIS!
I'LL GIVE HIM THE LETTER. IN EXCHANGE, CAN YOU TAKE ME THERE?
I HEARD THEM TALKING IN THE CHAPEL...
...MY FATHER AND THE HIGH PRIEST

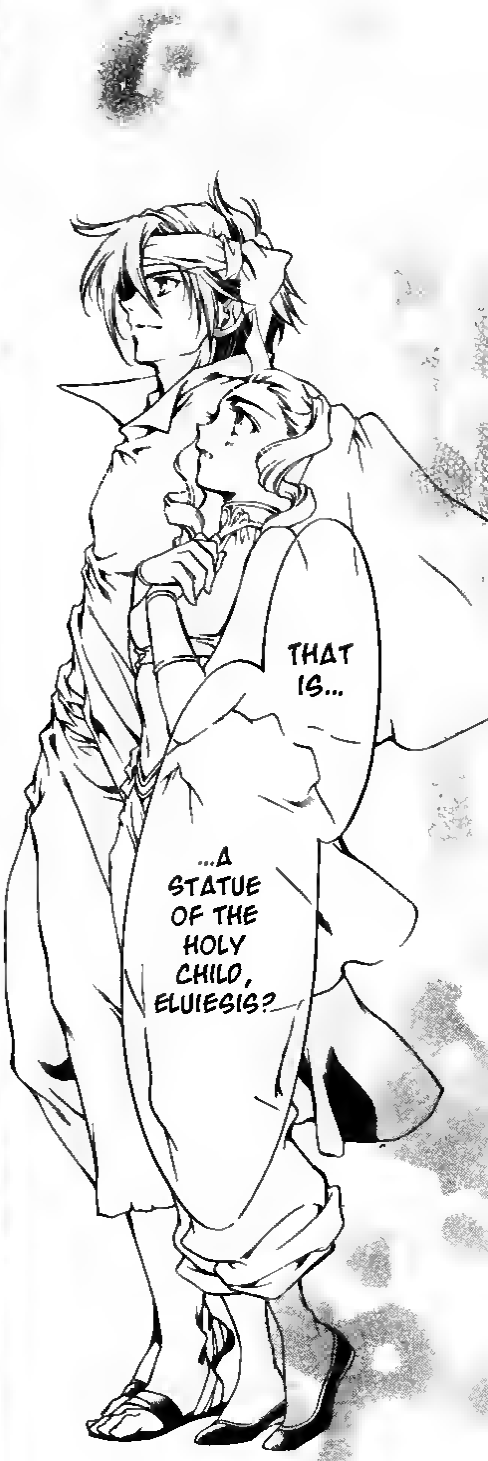
HIGH PRIEST MELIA-DES...
HE KNOWS ABOUT ME AND ADALE...
...AND HE HAS TOLD TOLBAT.
BUT WHY?

YOU'RE A STRANGE GIRL.
YOU'RE FROM GRAAL, BUT YOU WANT TO VISIT THE TEMPLE OF THE HOLY CHILD, ELUIESIS?
I THOUGHT ALL YOU GODDESS WORSHIPPERS WANTED TO GET RID OF THE OTHER RELIGIONS.
I...
...HAVE NEVER ENCOUNTERED NOR EXPERIENCED ANOTHER RELIGION BEFORE.

HMM...
EVERY-ONE IN THE PALACE AND CHURCH WORSHIPS ASTRAEA FAITHFULLY.
AND THEY DON'T LIKE THE OTHER RELIGIONS.
BUT I DON'T WANT TO DECIDE RIGHT AND WRONG...
...BASED ON WHAT SOMEBODY ELSE SAYS. I WANT TO SEE IT FOR MYSELF.
YOU'RE NOT WHAT YOU LOOK LIKE, EITHER.




IT LOOKS SO KIND, DOESN'T IT?
MY MOM DIED A LONG TIME AGO...
...BUT WHEN I COME HERE, I REMEMBER HER.


THAT IS...
...A STATUE OF THE HOLY CHILD, ELUIESIS?

I'M SO GLAD I CAME.
IT'S NOT AN EVIL RELIGION, LIKE THE HIGH PRIEST SAYS.
ELUIEGIS IS SUPPOSED TO HAVE BEEN A CHILD OF THE STAR GODDESS. AFTER A DISAGREEMENT WITH HER, HE VANISHED INTO THE DESERT.
BUT THE GODDESS AND HER CHILD MUST HAVE LOVED EACH OTHER VERY MUCH.
WHEN I LOOK AT THIS STATUE, I'M CERTAIN OF THAT.

YOU WERE PRAYING PRETTY HARD.
WAS IT FOR RUSSELL?
YOU'RE FROM GRAAL, BUT YOU STILL PUT YOUR HANDS TOGETHER FOR THE HOLY CHILD SO I CAN TELL YOU THIS.
LATELY, THE TOLBAT ROYAL FAMILY AND THE ASTRAEA HIGH PRIESTS HAVE BEEN PERSECUTING ANYBODY WHO'S NOT THEIR RELIGION.
TEARING DOWN CHURCHES, KILLING BELIEVERS...
RUSSELL'S NOT AN ASTRAEA BELIEVER, SO I WORRY ABOUT HIM IN THE PALACE.
THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE!
THE QUEEN IS HARSH WITH HERETICS, BUT SHE DOESN'T BOTHER THE OTHER RELIGIONS!

IF THAT'S THE CASE ...
...THEN SHE DOESN'T SEE WHAT'S GOING ON ALL THE WAY OUT HERE.
EITHER THAT...
...OR SHE'S PRETENDING SHE DOESN'T.

SO YOU'RE SAYING THERE IS A DARKNESS...
...WHERE THE LIGHT OF ASTRAEA CAN'T REACH?
AND IT'S HERE IN THIS COUNTRY ...
Ugh...
LADY...
ADALE...
KOFF

EZRET ISN'T RUSSELL'S FAMILY NAME?
RUSSELL'S ONE OF US THE NAME IS FROM...
WE'RE PART OF A BAND OF MERCE-NARIES CALLED EZRET.
NOPE
...A PLACE IN A COUN-TRY THAT NO LONGER EXISTS
AFTER CALDO-BOLSE WAS DE-STROYED BY BRI-GION...
...THE SURVIVORS FLED INTO THE DESERT.
THEY BECAME THE MERCENARIES KNOWN AS THE EZRET.

I'VE NEVER MET A MERCENARY BEFORE.
WHERE DO YOU USUALLY LIVE?
ANY-WHERE.
A WELL-LIKED MERCENARY BAND IS ALWAYS WORKING. WE GO ALL OVER THE DESERT.
YOU MEAN... YOU GUARD CARAVANS?
SURE.
BUT IF THE CLIENT'S WILLING TO PAY MORE THAN MARKET RATES...
...WE GET TO DO SOMETHING A LITTLE MORE "FUN."
MAYBE HE MEANS SOMETIMES THEY DO SHADY THINGS...
I'VE HEARD THAT THE PEOPLE OF THE DESERT ARE VERY BOLD...
THAT BAR BELONGS TO THE SCRIBE DELIN.

GET HER A DRINK, SOMETHING NON-ALCOHOLIC.
DELIN.
HEY, LITTLE TIGER.
SHE LOOKS EX-PENSIVE.

SHE'S FROM GRAAL ...?
THE PALACE?
SHE'S NOT LIKE THAT. SHE'S A GUEST OF THE PALACE.
SHUT UP!
SHE'S GONNA BE DELIVERING A LETTER TO RUSSELL FOR US.
GOT IT?!
AND ANYBODY WHO MESSES WITH HER, I FEED TO THE VULTURES.
CAN YOU REALLY TRUST HER?
ギロ
STILL...

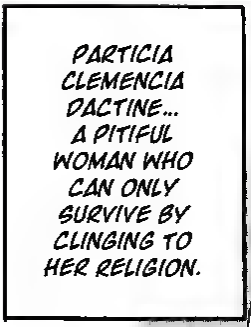
I...
...HAVE DECIDED TO TRUST HER!
OW OW OW!
HMM...
WHAT DO YOU WANT TO TELL RUS-SELL?
IF YOU CAN'T DECIDE WHAT TO WRITE, YOU SHOULD TALK ABOUT IT FIRST.

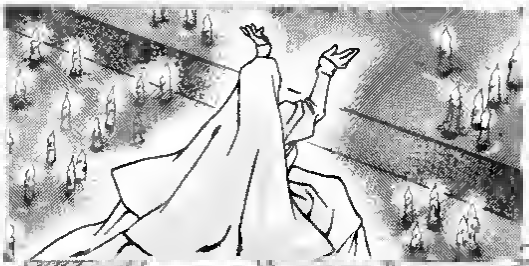
IT'S A TRAP.
THE TOLBAT ROYALS ARE PRETENDING TO PROTECT RUSSELL...
...FROM THE BRIGION ARMY. THEY'RE USING HIM AS PART OF THEIR PLAN.
PLAN?
IT'S A FEINT BY THE IMPERIAL ARMY.
EMPEROR ESCRADOS DIDN'T SEND HIS ARMY TO CRUSH ONE PRINCE.
THE BRIGION ARMIES ARE HEADING FURTHER SOUTH.
WHY?! THERE'S NOTHING BUT THE DRAGON FOREST DOWN THERE!
DON'T KNOW.
SOUTH--?!
WHAT DID YOU SAY?
ANYWAY, THE TOLBAT ROYALS KNOW THAT...
...AND THEY'RE LETTING RUSSELL STAY THERE ANYWAY. IT SMELLS LIKE A DIRTY TRICK.

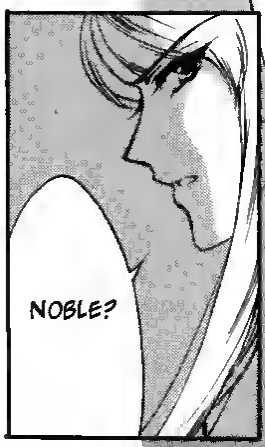
I THINK...
...HE KNEW IT WAS A TRAP WHEN HE WENT.
RUSSELL IS PREPARED TO DIE.
AS THE PRINCE OF HIS COUNTRY, ONCE HE'S DEAD THE EMPIRE WILL STOP FOLLOWING THE EZRET.
THAT'S WHY HE'S NOT TRYING TO CONTACT US.
TIGA...
THAT FOOL!
I'M NOT LETTING HIM DO IT!

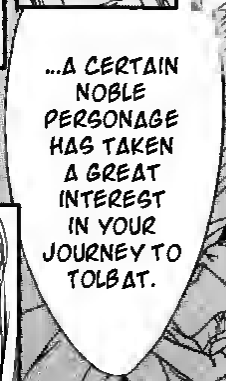
WHAT ARE YOU PLANNING...
...HIGH PRIEST MELIADES?
HMM?
WHATEVER DO YOU MEAN?
DON'T TRY AND FOOL ME!
I'M ASKING WHAT YOU INTENDED TO GAIN BY TELLING TOLBAT ABOUT ME AND ADALE.
ABSURD.
MY ONLY INTENTION IS TO PROTECT YOU...
... DAUGHTER OF THE DACTINE.

YOUR MOTHER ...
...PARTICIA SPOKE TO ME OF THIS AS WELL.


PARTICIA CLEMENCIA DACTINE... A PITIFUL WOMAN WHO CAN ONLY SURVIVE BY CLINGING TO HER RELIGION.




NOBLE?


...A CERTAIN NOBLE PERSONAGE HAS TAKEN A GREAT INTEREST IN YOUR JOURNEY TO TOLBAT.

YOUR MOTHER AND ONE MORE PERSON ...

ABANDONED BY MY FATHER, SHE BECAME A FANATIC.

HIGH PRIESTESS MANIEL.
HER HOLINESS THINKS HIGHLY OF YOUR INTELLI-GENCE AND TALENTS.
SHE BELIEVES YOU WORTHY OF THE "NEW ERA" SHE IS CREATING.
I HAVE BEEN SENT HERE TO HELP YOU REALIZE THAT.

NEW ERA? SHE IS...
...THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE GODDESS. WHAT IS SHE...?
HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT IT, YOUNG PRINCESS?
WHY ISN'T IT YOU?
WHY, DESPITE YOUR NOBLE BLOOD, YOU ARE NOT A QUEEN-IN-WAITING AND HAVE NO CHANCE TO BECOME QUEEN?
WHAT ?!

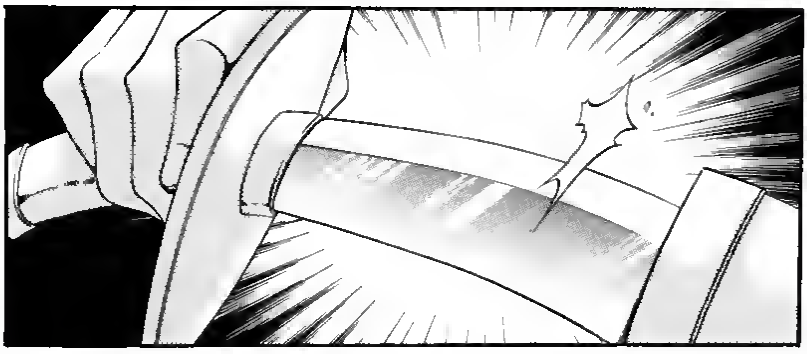
YOU SHOULD UNDERSTAND WELL HOW SHE FEELS. FOR THE PAST FEW DECADES...
...THE HIGH PRIESTESS HAS BEEN RUNNING THE COUNTRY IN PLACE OF THE AGED QUEEN.
EVEN IF SHE IS NOT...
...A DIRECT DESCENDANT, SHE CAN RULE GRAAL.
I'M... JEALOUS OF ADALE?
NO ...!
NO !!
I THINK SHE IS THE ONE WHO SHOULD BE QUEEN...
WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MORE TALENTED PERSON BEING ON TOP?
HUFF

IF THE HIGH PRIESTESS WANTS TO BE QUEEN...
...THEN ADALE AND LEANDRA ARE IN HER WAY!
YOU'RE NOT PLANNING ON DOING ANYTHING TO ADALE, ARE YOU?!
ADALE!
THANK YOU, TIGA I CAN GO THE REST OF THE WAY MYSELF.

...WE'RE SURE WE CAN DO IT!

TELL RUSSELL ...
...TO GET OUT OF THE PALACE RIGHT NOW.
EVEN IF IT MEANS WE HAVE TO RUN FROM THE IMPERIAL ARMY AGAIN...

I'LL TELL HIM.



WHEN I GIVE THE SIGNAL, RUN FOR THE PALACE.
THEY'RE AFTER YOU.
TIGA!
STAY CLOSE!

RUN!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
BE-HIND YOU!
I CAN'T !!
M-
MY LEGS...!

AAAH!
TIGA!
DAMN!
TIGA!!

THEY'RE PRETTY INTENT ON KILLING YOU.
!
IT'S POI-SONED ...
DON'T TOUCH THE BLADE!
MY LORD BROTH-ER!

PLEASE, TIGA...
...DON'T DIE!
I'M SO SORRY !!
IT'S MY FAULT FOR NOT BEING ABLE TO RUN.
!
HIS CUT IS POI-SONED ...

YOU OKAY, MISS?!
GWAH!

THE PEOPLE WHO WERE IN DELIN'S BAR!

TIGA ...?
HEY, LITTLE TIGER!

THEY'RE STRONG ...
...LIKE A WELL-TRAINED ARMY.

GUH!

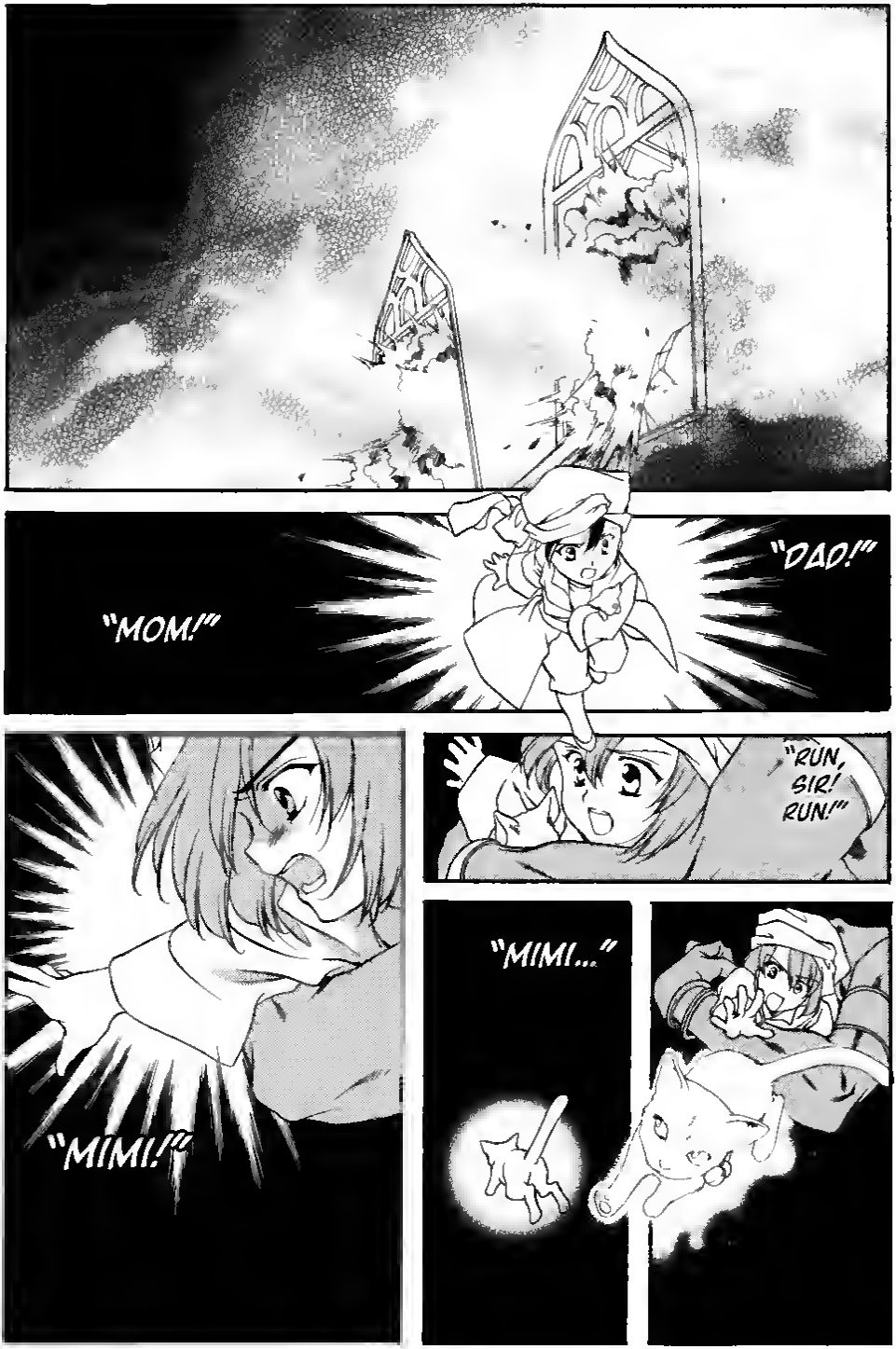
SO YOU THOUGHT YOU COULD TAKE ON SIX AT ONCE, AND YOU GOT HURT?
DID YOU THINK YOU WERE THOTH THE SUPER-HUMAN?
WHAT DID YOU THINK YOU WERE DOING WITHOUT RUSSELL AND GOGAR HERE?
DELIN...
...I'M SORRY.
ANYWAY, OUR PRIORITY NOW IS IDENTI-FYING THE POISON.
SOMEONE BROUGHT BACK THE POISONED BLADE, RIGHT?
RIGHT HERE
YOU ARE...

BUT IF I CAN IDENTIFY THE POISON, I CAN MAKE AN ANTIDOTE.
I'M NOT SURE.
CAN YOU SAVE TIGA?
TIGA WAS RAISED TO HAVE POISON RESIS-TANCE.
A NORMAL PERSON WOULD HAVE DIED INSTANTLY.
MISS, MY LEGS AREN'T WHAT THEY USED TO BE.
WOULD YOU GO OUT BACK AND GET SOME WATER ...
...AND DO WHAT YOU CAN TO TAKE CARE OF HIM?

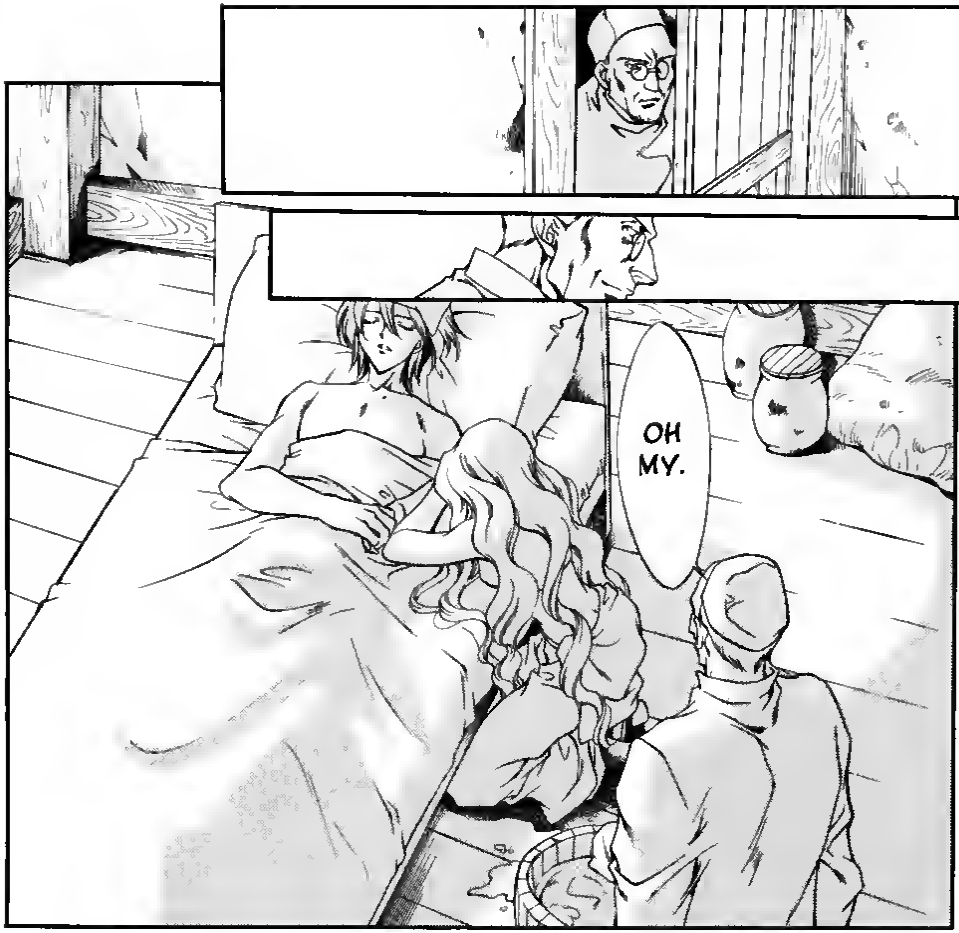
IF I GIVE HIM A DRUG TO NEUTRALIZE THE POISON, IT WILL PARALYZE HIM.
AND THEN HE'LL HAVE A HORRIBLE FEVER.
IF THE FEVER GETS HIM, EVEN IF HE SURVIVES HE'LL BE A VEGETABLE.
YOU NEED TO KEEP HIM COOL.
TONIGHT WILL DETERMINE IF HE LIVES OR DIES.
UH...
AAH!
UWAH...
DON'T DIE, TIGA!

HOW IS TIGA?!
OH.
DELIN GAVE HIM AN ANTI-DOTE NOW WE WAIT..
MISS...
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA...
...WHO MIGHT WANT TO KILL YOU? THEY WERE AFTER YOU PERSON-ALLY.

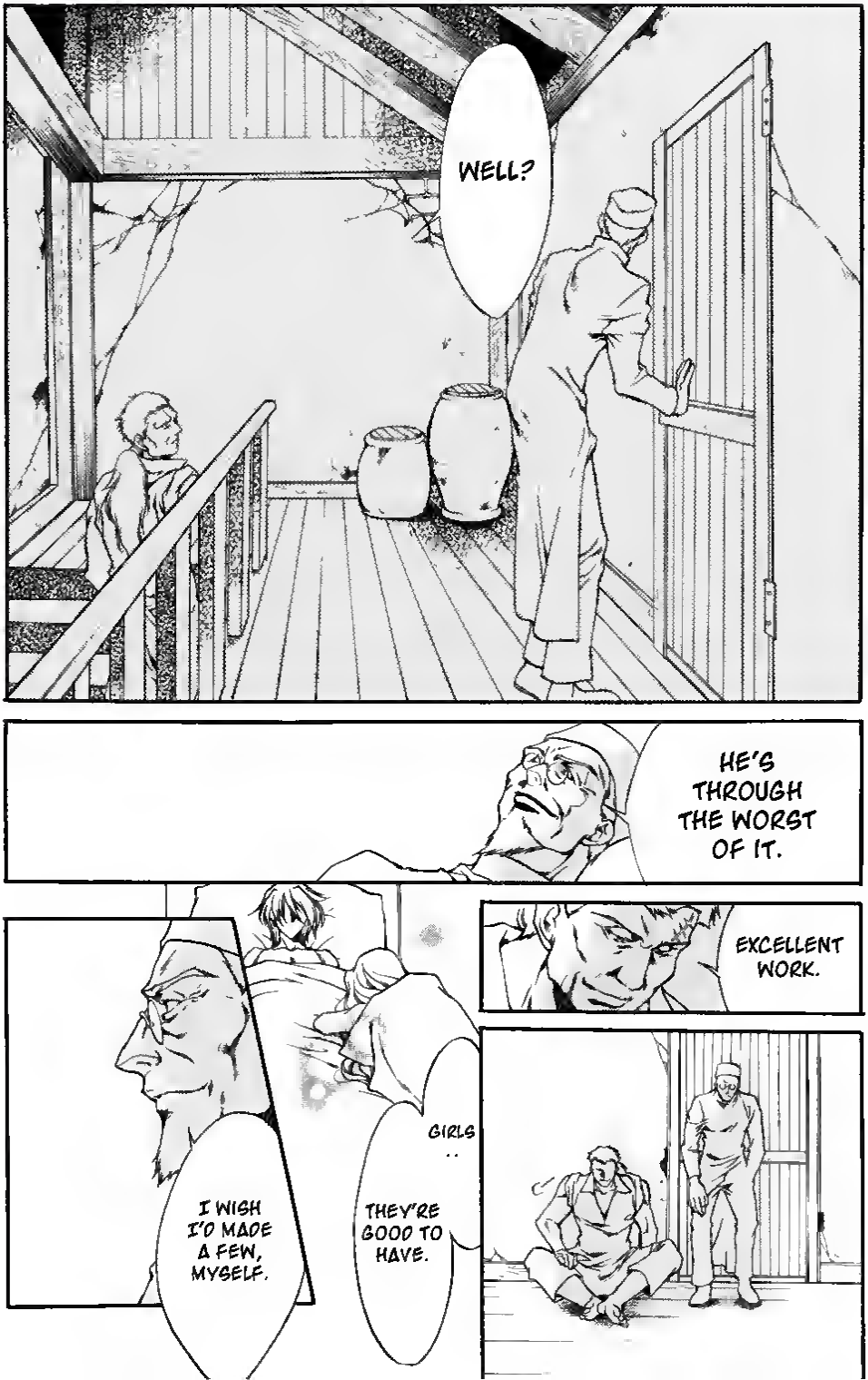
WITH RUSSELL AND GOGAR LOCKED UP, WE'VE BEEN MAD ENOUGH. AND NOW TIGA...
YOUR ENEMY IS NOW OUR ENEMY.
BUT WE DON'T LET ANY-BODY MESS WITH US AND GET AWAY WITH IT. EVER.
WE DON'T LIKE KILLING OR HURTING PEOPLE WHEN WE DON'T HAVE TO.
SURE THING.
WHEN YOU FIND OUT WHO HIRED THEM, WILL YOU PLEASE TELL ME TOO?
SOME OF THE MEN ARE INTERROGAT-ING THE GUYS WHO ATTACKED YOU TWO.
GULP.


"MOM!"
"DAD!"
"RUN, SIR! RUN!"
"MIMI!"
"MIMI..."

MIMI...
RUN...
IT'S BURN-ING...
MIMI ...
MOTHER ...
YOU CAN DO THIS!
トン トン
Phew...


OH MY.

THANK YOU, YOUNG LADY.


WELL?
HE'S THROUGH THE WORST OF IT.
EXCELLENT WORK.
I WISH I'D MADE A FEW, MYSELF.
GIRLS..
THEY'RE GOOD TO HAVE.

DID THEY TALK?
A BIT.
THEY WERE PAID TO ATTACK HER AND HER COMPANION.
ABOUT THOSE ASSASSINS WHO ATTACKED HER...
A WOMAN'S BODY WAS FOUND IN AN ALLEY.
IT WAS... GRUESOME.

A GRAAL POWER STRUGGLE
THEY'RE ALL SO HIGH-BRED THAT THEY CAN BE REALLY NASTY.
SO A POWER STRUGGLE FROM THE CONTI-NENT'S IN-TERIOR?
YOU CAN TELL BY HER FINGER-TIPS...
I'D LIKE TO STAY OUT OF IT, BUT THAT'S NOT AN OPTION NOW.
...AND THE WAY SHE TALKS. SHE MUST BE FROM AN IMPORTANT FAMILY
SURE ENOUGH ...
...THEY TOOK IT AND RAN RIGHT INTO THE PALACE'S ASTRAEA TEMPLE
SO WE GAVE THEM A CHANCE TO ESCAPE
THE THUGS WOULD NOT SAY WHO HIRED THEM
WHOEVER ATTACKED HER IS PART OF THE GRAAL PRIESTHOOD.

I'M FINE!
NO!
DON'T TREAT ME LIKE I'M SICK!
YOU NEED TO STAY DOWN!

I KNEW YOU WERE THERE THE WHOLE TIME.
YOU'RE LYING.

YOU LOST CONSCIOUSNESS AND WERE MOANING IN YOUR SLEEP FOR A WHILE LAST NIGHT!

THAT WOUND... WAS THAT ME?

YOU THRASHED ABOUT TOO!
IT WAS HORRIBLE, TRYING TO HOLD YOU DOWN.

IF YOU'RE SORRY, THEN STAY PUT!
I'M SORRY.
I WAS DREAM-ING OF...
...A TIME LONG AGO.
IT WAS...
...THE NIGHT WHEN THE ALGRAT PALACE BURNED.

MY MOM...
MY DAD...
...EVEN MY LITTLE CAT... EVERYTHING BURNED.
"LIVE..."

"MOTH-ER."
I TRY TO REMEM-BER WHAT I CAN OF HER FACE...
...BUT IT JUST TURNS INTO THE GODDESS, HOLDING THE HOLY CHILD.
スウー……

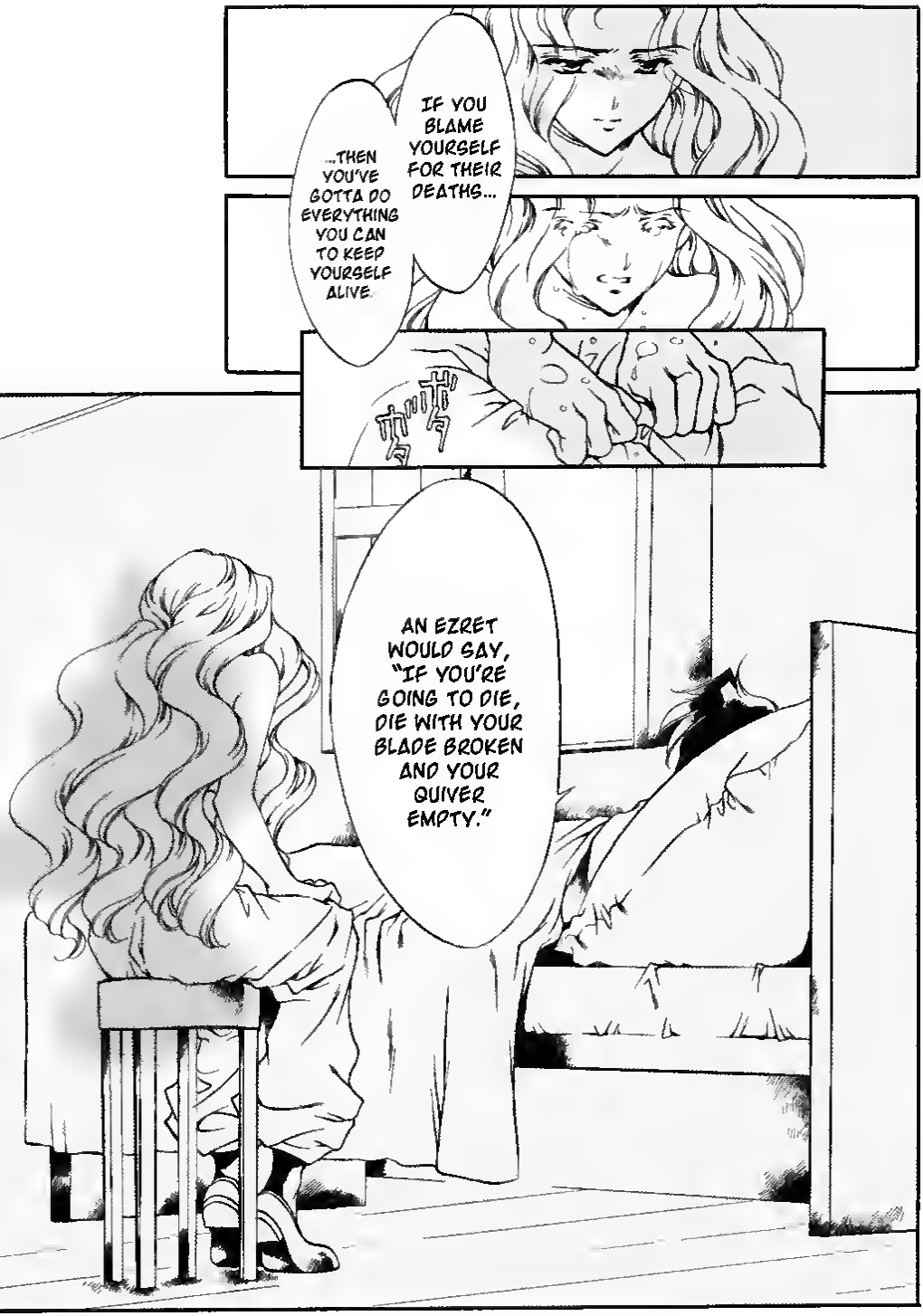
I'VE BROUGHT SOMETHING TO EAT. ...IS TIGA AWAKE?
THANK YOU, DELIN.
IT'S GOOD HE'S ASLEEP. I NEED TO TALK TO YOU.
IT... WON'T BE A PLEASANT DISCUSSION.
SHALL WE WAIT UNTIL AFTER YOU EAT?
YOUNG LADY... DID YOU GO INTO TOWN ALONE?
DID YOU PERHAPS HAVE A WOMAN WITH YOU? IN HER 30S?
WHAT HAPPENED TO AMELIA?
AMELIA...

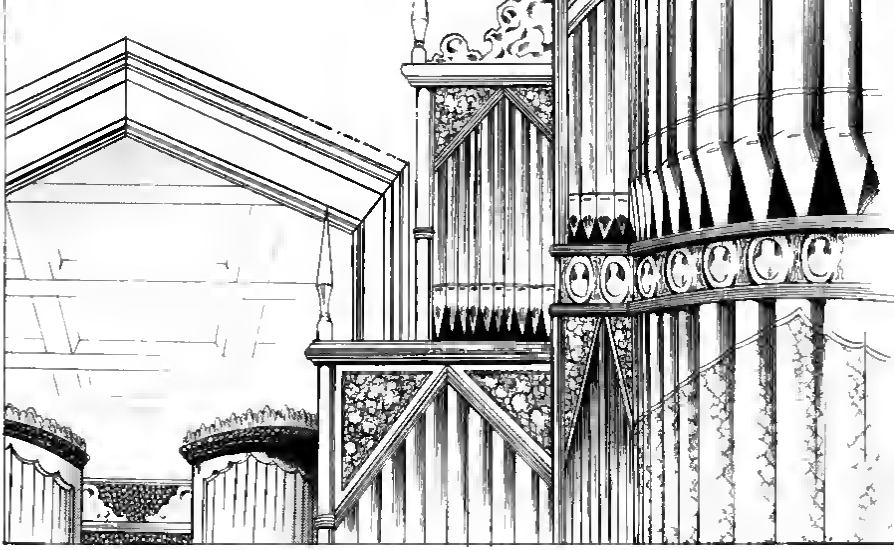
WHAT HAP-PENED?
.....
... NOTH-ING.
IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE NOTH-ING.
THE WOMAN WHO TOOK ME INTO TOWN...
SHE DIED.
I KILLED HER.

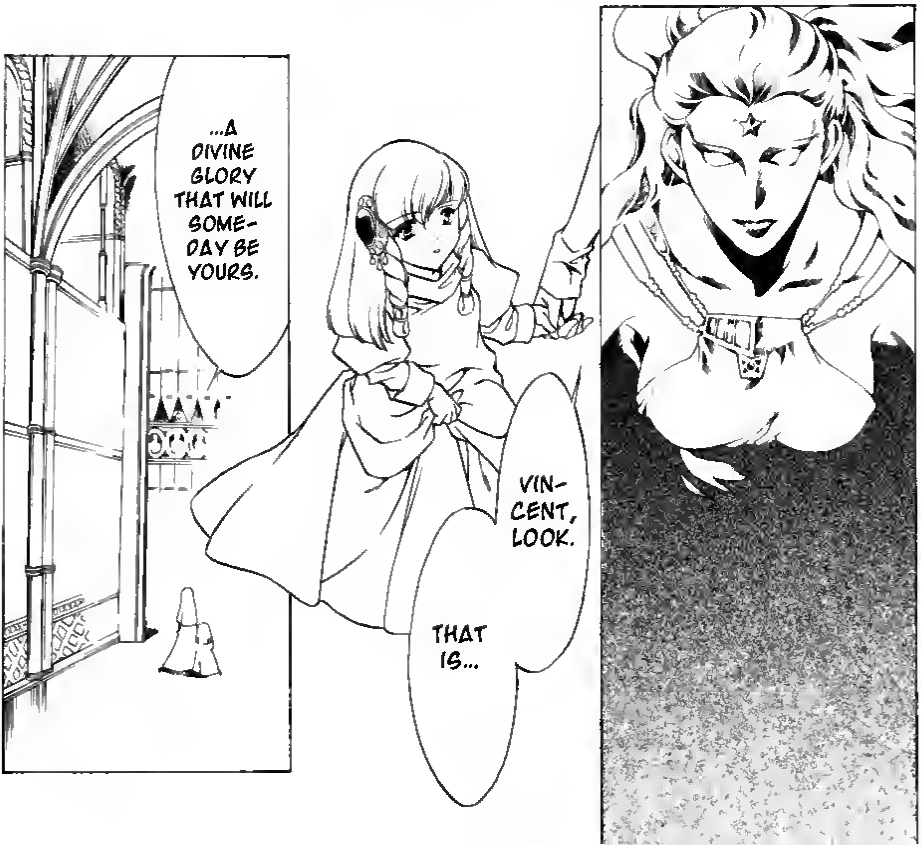
EVEN OUTSIDE OF HIERAGLION THEY STILL HAVE AN INFORMATION NETWORK.
IT MUST HAVE BEEN SOMEONE WITH THE CHURCH...
SHE TOOK ME OUT BECAUSE I WAS BEING SO SELFISH.
I UNDERESTIMATED THEM...
...AND IT COST AMELIA HER LIFE.
IT'S MY FAULT.

WHY WAS I BORN?
NO MATTER WHAT I DO OR WHERE I GO, I JUST BRING CONFLICT.
TIGA ALMOST DYING...
AND AMELIA...
AND MY LORD BROTHER GOING INTO BATTLE...
I SAID I HATED CONFLICT...
IT'S ALL MY FAULT.
...THAT I WANTED TO MAKE A WORLD WITHOUT IT...
INSTEAD, I'M CREATING IT!
"I'LL DRIVE OFF THE FOOTSTEPS OF WAR!"

IF THERE ARE PEOPLE WILLING TO DIE FOR YOU...
...THEN THAT MEANS THERE ARE PEOPLE WILLING TO LIVE FOR YOU TOO, RIGHT?
IN THAT CASE...
...THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH TRYING TO FIGHT FOR THEIR SAKE.


IF YOU BLAME YOURSELF FOR THEIR DEATHS...
...THEN YOU'VE GOTTA DO EVERYTHING YOU CAN TO KEEP YOURSELF ALIVE.
AN EZRET WOULD SAY, "IF YOU'RE GOING TO DIE, DIE WITH YOUR BLADE BROKEN AND YOUR QUIVER EMPTY."




...A DIVINE GLORY THAT WILL SOME-DAY BE YOURS.
VIN-CENT, LOOK.
THAT IS...

EARTHLY GLORY BELONGS TO THE QUEEN'S FAMILY.
BUT THE OACTINE ARE THE HOUSE OF GOD.
THEY ARE EVEN CLOSER TO ASTRAEA THAN THE QUEENS.
"MOTHER..."
"TO ME, YOU ARE..."
HIGH PRIEST-ESS MANIEL WANTS TO BE QUEEN.
BUT AS THE QUEEN'S REPRESENTA-TIVE, HER POWER AND INFLUENCE IS EQUAL TO OR GREATER THAN THE QUEEN'S...

IT MAY BE INEVITABLE THAT, TO DEVOUT FOLLOWERS OF ASTRAEA...
...THE HIGH PRIESTS ARE LIKE A SHINING SUN, WHILE THE ABSENT QUEEN IS LIKE A HAZY MOON.
AND I AM AT THE CENTER OF THEM.
EXCUSE ME.
WOULD SHE TREAT ME KINDLY DESPITE KNOWING I WAS OF THE HIGH PRIEST'S BLOOD?
IF ADALE KNEW ABOUT THIS...

KING SHALO HAS INVITED YOU TO BREAKFAST.
WEL-COME.
I SEE YOU RESEMBLE LILYSET.
IF THE GRAAL TARIFFS WERE A LITTLE LOWER, WE WOULDN'T HAVE SO MANY PROBLEMS WITH THE EAST...
HIGH PRIEST MELIADES!

THE HIGH PRIEST...
...AND KING SHALO?
OF COURSE ...
...IT'S AN EMBARRASSMENT TO MAKE THINGS SO DIFFICULT FOR OUR ASTRAEAN BRETHREN.
I KNEW YOU'D UNDERSTAND, HIGH PRIEST!
HE ACTS LIKE HE'S THE FOREIGN MINISTER...
BY THE WAY, HIGH PRIEST...
...HOW MUCH LONGER MUST WE LEAVE THAT MAN IN OUR PALACE?

DON'T WORRY. THE ISSUE IS ALMOST RESOLVED.
AND ONCE IT IS, YOU MAY DO WITH HIM AS YOU PLEASE.
HE IS SUCH A BEAUTIFUL BOY...
YOU MAY LEAVE IT TO ME.
YES. BUT SIMPLY HANDING HIM OVER TO THE EMPIRE WOULD MAKE ENEMIES.
I THINK WE OUGHT TO...
UNDER-STOOD.

PLEASE WAIT!
THIS IS SIR RUSSELL'S ROOM.
WE CANNOT ALLOW ANYONE TO ENTER WITHOUT PERMIS-SION...
TELL HIM BARONESS TELFORD IS HERE FROM GRAAL!
Eek!~
RUSSELL EZRET!
WHERE ARE YOU?
ARE YOU HERE, RUSSELL ?!

I SEE THE BEAUTIFUL ARE BEAUTIFUL NO MATTER HOW THEY DRESS, BARONESS TELFORD.
SKIP THE FLAT-TERY.
THERE'S LITTLE TIME, SO I'LL MAKE THIS QUICK.
PLEASE DO.

A SERIOUS ISSUE.
WHY COME TO ME?
THIS MORNING, THE BODY OF SOME-ONE IN MY EMPLOY ...
...WAS FOUND IN THE MARKET NEAR THE PALACE. THE OTHER WOMAN WHO WENT WITH HER IS MISSING.
BECAUSE SOMEONE SAW THE MISSING WOMAN WITH ONE OF THE EZRET!

THE PROBLEM IS THAT YOU'RE HERE IN THE PALACE.
CAN YOU SWEAR THAT NONE OF YOUR FRIENDS HAVE ANYTHING AGAINST THE COURT?
AND YOU BELIEVE THE EZRET ARE RESPONSIBLE?
I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY YOU'RE IN THE PALACE AT ALL.
NONE OF THE NOBLES HERE ARE YOUR FRIENDS.
YOU'RE A VERY FRANK PERSON
YOU'RE SURROUNDED BY PEOPLE WHO JUST WANT TO USE YOU.
BUT WHY COME TO ME, INSTEAD OF ADDRESSING THE EZRET DIRECTLY?
MY MY...

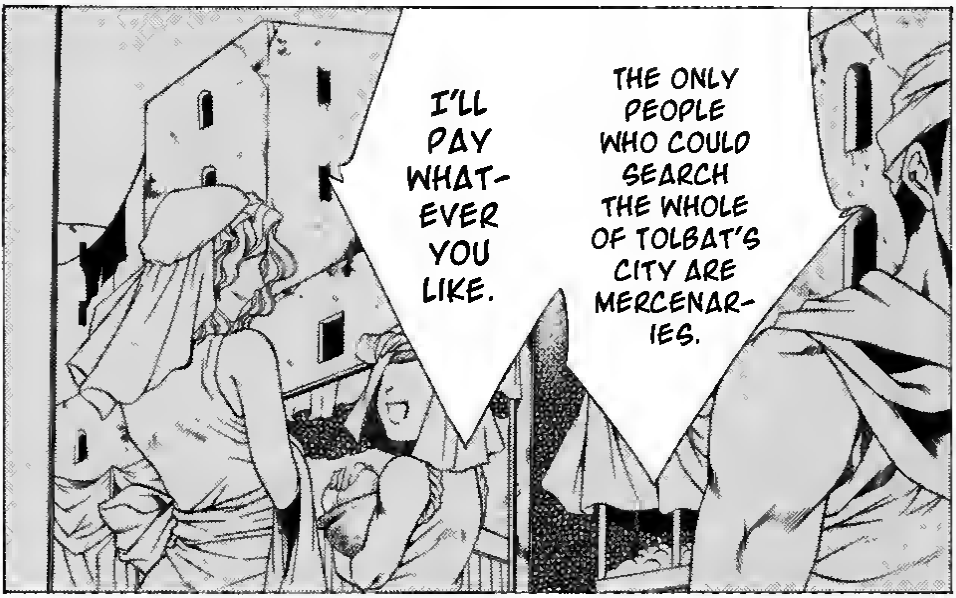
...IS THAT IT UPSETS ME GREATLY TO SEE THE FRIENDSHIP I OFFERED TO YOU RETURNED IN SUCH A MANNER!
THE REASON I'VE COME HERE...
IT INFURIATES ME TO THINK I THOUGHT WELL OF YOU!
Ha ha ha ha
YOU ARE AN INTERESTING PERSON.
Ah!
FOR-GIVE ME, BUT...

GOGAR, I'VE TAKEN A LIKING TO HER.
SHE'S NOT LIKE YOUR AVERAGE TWO-TONGUED GRAALIAN.
DON'T YOU THINK SHE CAN BE TRUSTED?
AND SHE WANTS TO BE MY FRIEND AS WELL.
YOU MAY TREAT HER AS YOU WISH, JUST DON'T FALL IN LOVE...
...AND DO SOMETHING YOU'LL REGRET.
HE'S A SERVANT, YET HE SPEAKS WITH RUSSELL ON EQUAL TERMS.
OF COURSE, I ALSO THINK SHE'S TELLING THE TRUTH.
I REALLY DON'T UNDERSTAND YOU.
WHAT DOES STAYING IN THE PALACE GET YOU?
DID YOU JUST WANT TO REGAIN THE COURTLY LIFE YOU'D LOST, NO MATTER THE MEANS?

WHY AM I HERE?
I AM ALMOST OF AGE...
SO INSTEAD... I'M GOING TO GIVE MYSELF UP.
...AND MY IMPERIAL PURSUERS...
THEY BECOME MORE FEROCIOUS EVERY YEAR. WE WON'T BE ABLE TO EVADE THEM FOREVER.
TOLBAT THINKS I'M WORTH USING...
...AND I WANTED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEM AS WELL.

HE WAS...
...PLANNING ON HIS OWN DEATH...
...THE MOMENT HE SET FOOT IN THIS PALACE!
I WAS NOT KIDNAPPED AND FORCED TO BE HERE.
THERE'S NO REASON FOR MY COMPANIONS AND THE COURT TO BE UPSET WITH ONE ANOTHER.
PERHAPS MY DEATH...
...MIGHT EVEN CAUSE THE EMPEROR A FEW SECONDS OF LOST SLEEP?
WHAT MATTERS IS THAT, IF EVERYONE IS SURE RUSSELL EZRET IS DEAD...
...ESCRADOS WON'T FEEL THE NEED TO CHASE THE EZRET ANYMORE.

THEN PLEASE--
YES.
SO YOU'RE SAYING THE EZRET...
...AREN'T RESPON-SIBLE FOR THIS?
HELP ME!!
HAVE YOUR MEN SEARCH FOR THE GIRL WHO WENT MISSING!


I'LL PAY WHAT-EVER YOU LIKE.
THE ONLY PEOPLE WHO COULD SEARCH THE WHOLE OF TOLBAT'S CITY ARE MERCENAR-IES.

I HATE TO SAY IT...
...BUT THIS ONE SERVING GIRL...
...SEEMS AWFULLY IMPORTANT TO YOU
I WANT TO GET HER BACK!
PRINCESS ADALE!!
SHE IS.
I WOULD SACRIFICE MY LIFE...
...IF IT WOULD SAFELY GET HER BACK.
I SUSPECT THERE AREN'T MANY PEOPLE...
...YOU'D BE WILLING TO SACRIFICE YOUR LIFE FOR
IF SHE'S NOT JUST SOME SERVANT...
THINK WHAT YOU WILL.
FOR NOW, PLEASE, FOCUS ON THE MATTER AT HAND.

DON'T WORRY.
SHE'S JUST FINE.
I RECEIVED A MESSAGE FROM THE EZRET THIS MORNING.
"WE'VE GOT A GIRL FROM THE COURT WITH US." IT'S PROBABLY YOUR SERVING GIRL.
IT WAS SO CONVENIENT THAT I THOUGHT IT WAS A TRAP AT FIRST, BUT...
ガシャン
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?!
SHE'S ALIVE?
OH GOD-DESS...

AS SOON AS I HEARD THAT ...
...THERE CEASED TO BE ANY POINT IN STAYING HERE IN THE PALACE.
...ONE OF MY FRIENDS WAS WOUNDED.
HE MAY DIE.
BUT THIS ISN'T GOOD NEWS FOR THE EZRET. IN EXCHANGE FOR SAVING HER...
NO MATTER WHAT...
...I MUST LEAVE HERE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE!

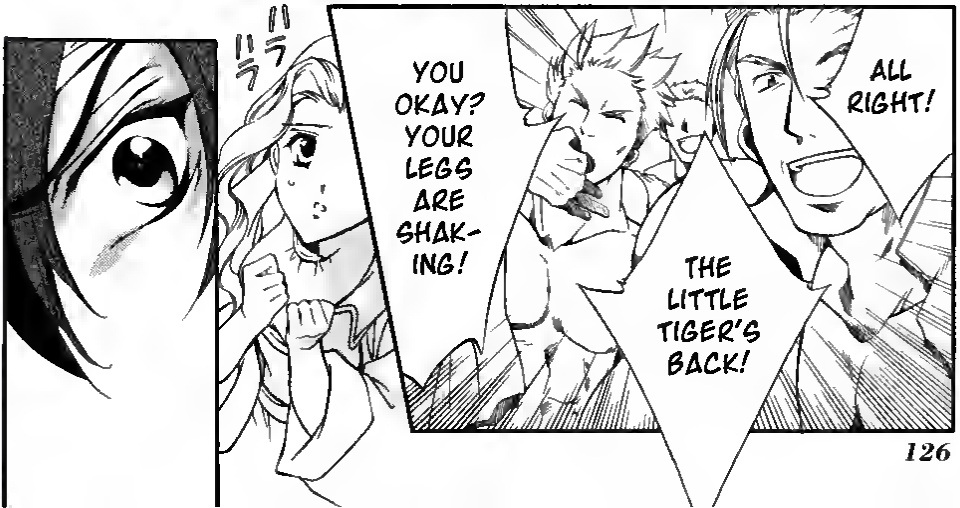
CECILIA!
VI?
ヨロ…
IS...
...ADALE REALLY SAFE?
YES.
THE EZRET HAVE HER.
OH...!!
ADALE IS ALIVE!

I CAN'T GO!
NO...
HOW...
HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO FACE HER?
AND THAT'S NOT ALL.
WE'LL LEAVE HERE TONIGHT AND MEET UP WITH THE EZRET.
WE NEED TO LET LADY ROLAND KNOW ABOUT WHAT THE PRIESTS ARE PLANNING RIGHT AWAY!
SO WE HAVE TO GET GOING.
SOMEONE MIGHT THINK I'M WITH THE PEOPLE WHO TRIED TO KILL HER!
CAN I EVEN LOOK AT HER...
...AND ASK HER TO BELIEVE ME?

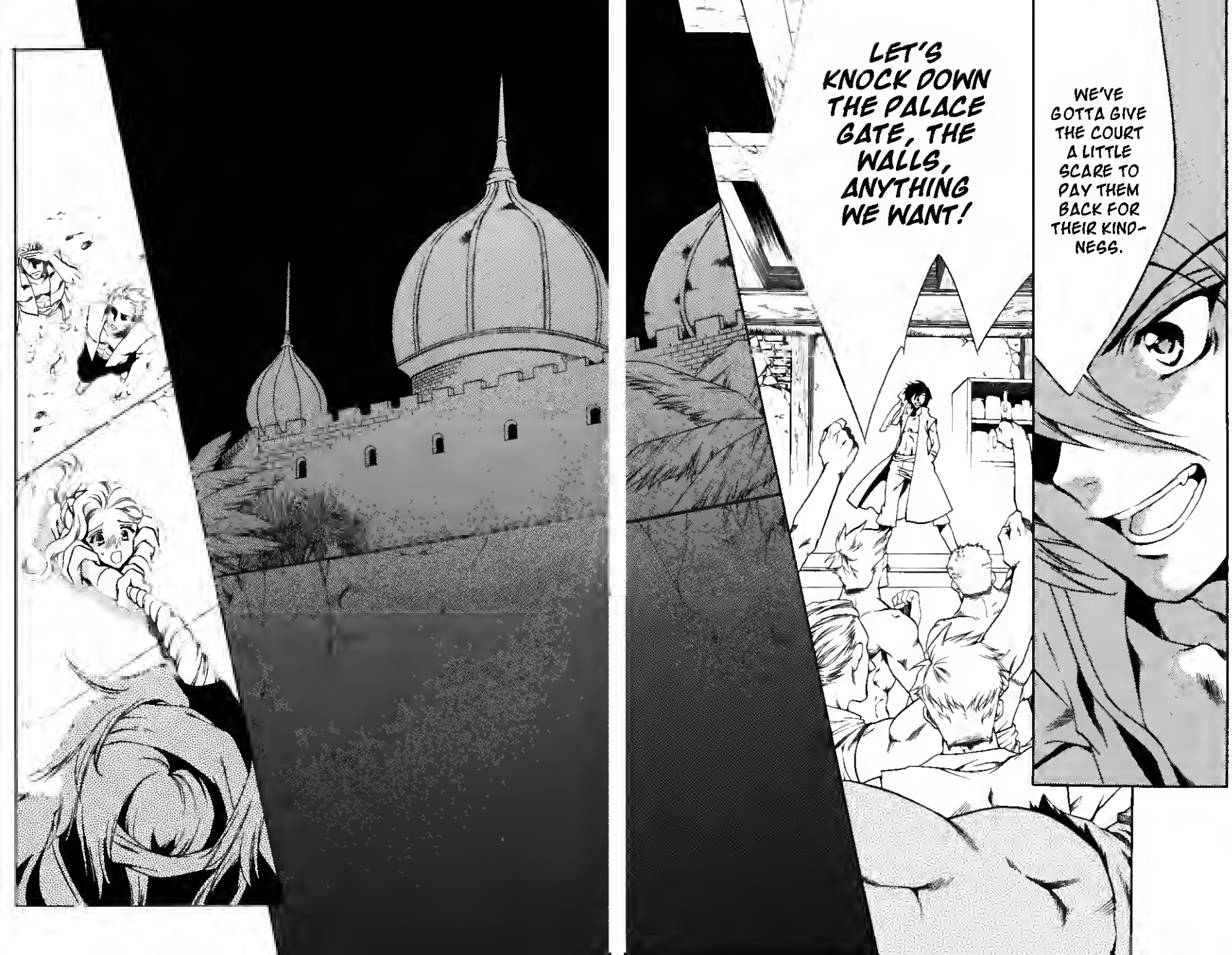
EVANGELINE APPEARS AS FRAGILE AS A SPRING FLOWER, BUT WHEN YOU LOOK CLOSER, HER PEN IS STRONG AND MERCILESS.
BUT— CAN I HONESTLY SAY I'VE NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT IT?
EVEN IF MY GRADES HAVE CONSISTENTLY BEEN BETTER, I'VE ALWAYS BEEN PROUD TO BE HER AIDE.
THAT IN TERMS OF ABILITY...
THE TRAITOROUS HIGH PRIEST AND I...
THAT IT SHOULD BE ME, NOT HER?
HOW ARE WE DIFFERENT?
WHY COULDN'T IT HAVE BEEN ME?

IF YOU STAY IN THE PALACE WITH THE HIGH PRIEST...
...THEN IT'S SAFE TO ASSUME YOU'RE WORKING WITH HIM.
THEN THAT'S ALL THE MORE REASON!
I UNDER-STAND HOW YOU FEEL.
BUT NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO HESITATE.
I'LL COME FOR YOU THIS EVENING. BE READY BY THEN!
BROTH-ERS! I'M BACK!

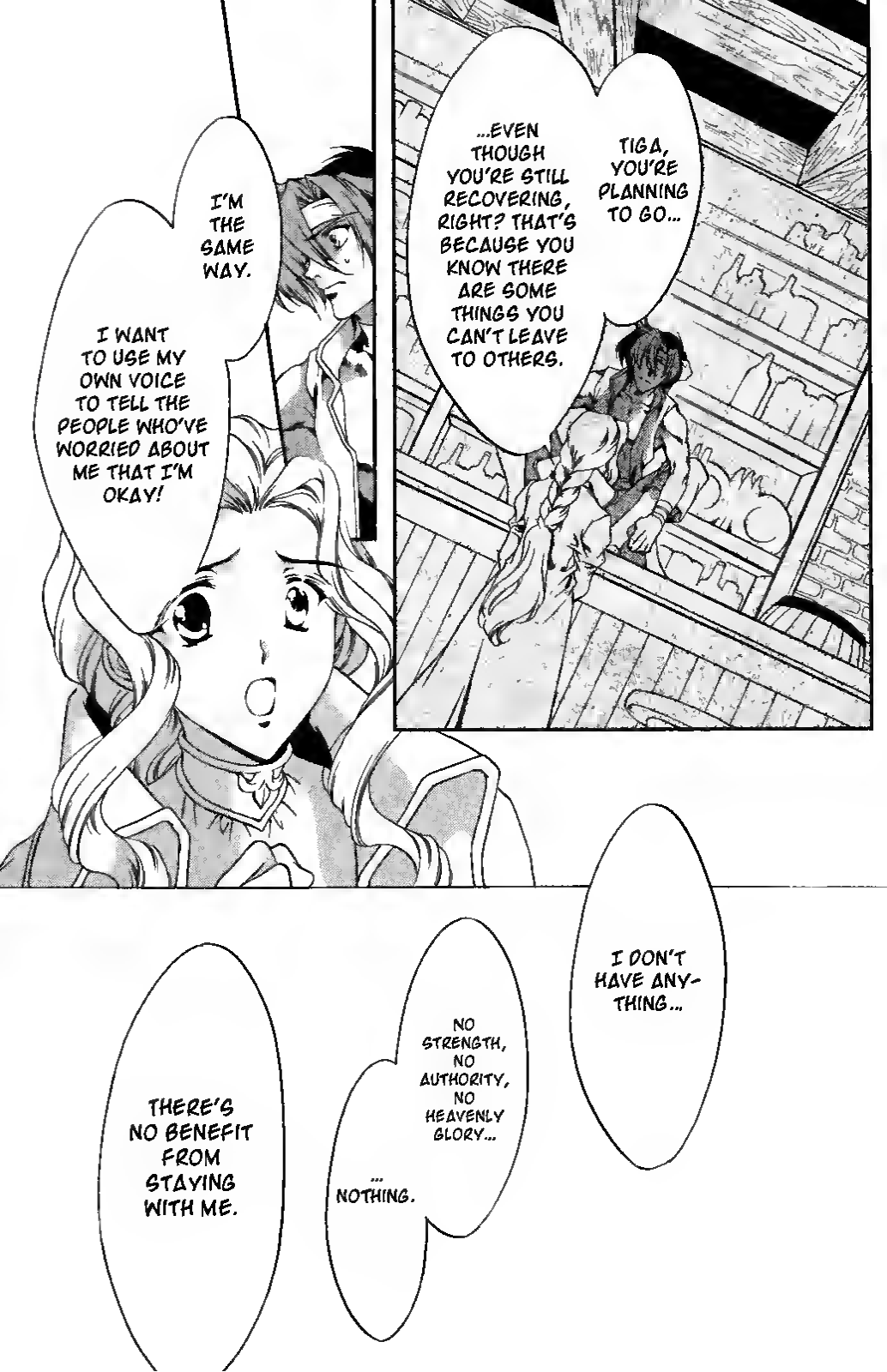
WE'RE HEADING OUT!
TONIGHT, WE DRAG RUSSELL AND GOGAR OUT OF THE PALACE!

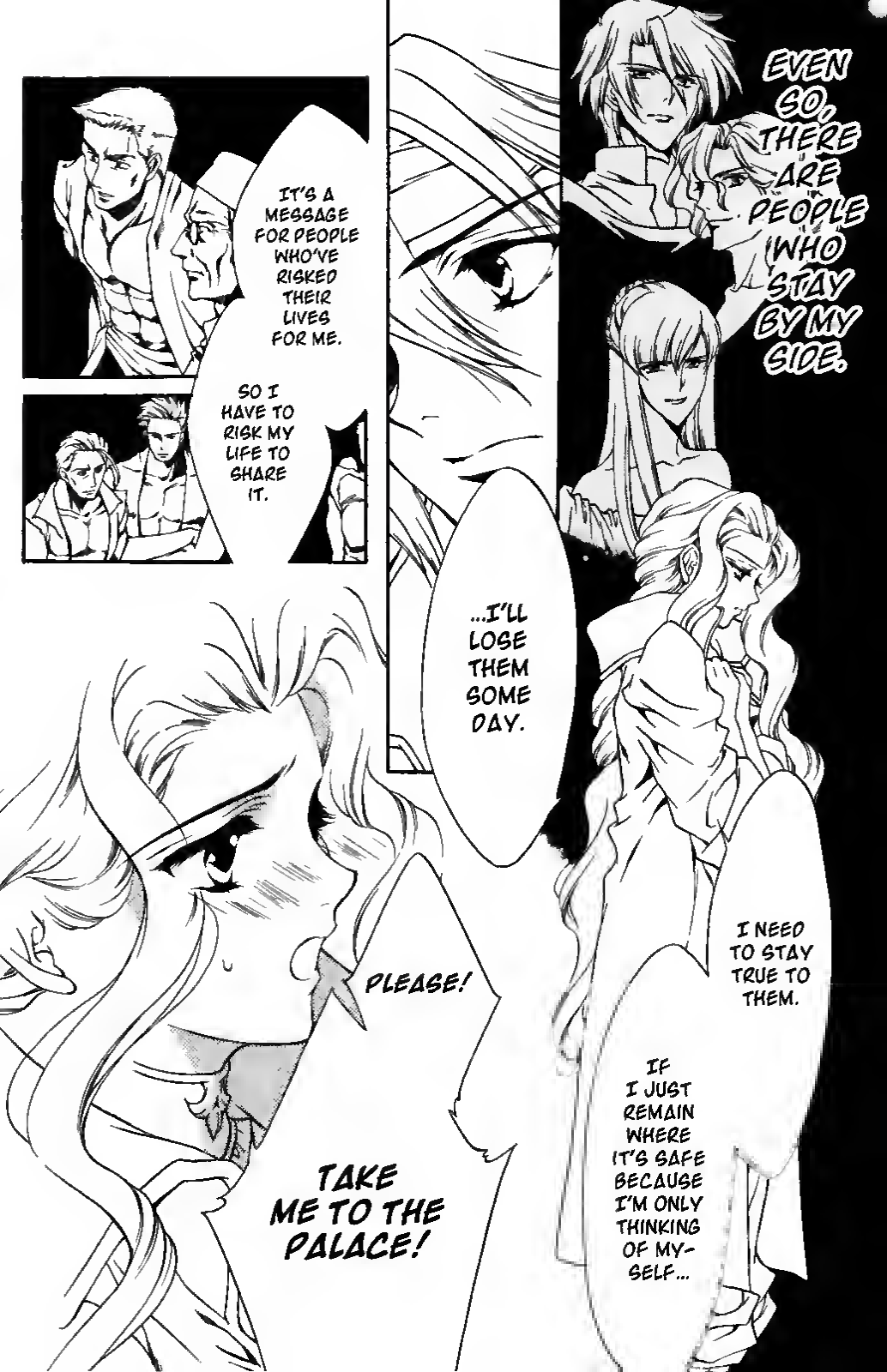

ALL RIGHT!
YOU OKAY? YOUR LEGS ARE SHAK-ING!
THE LITTLE TIGER'S BACK!

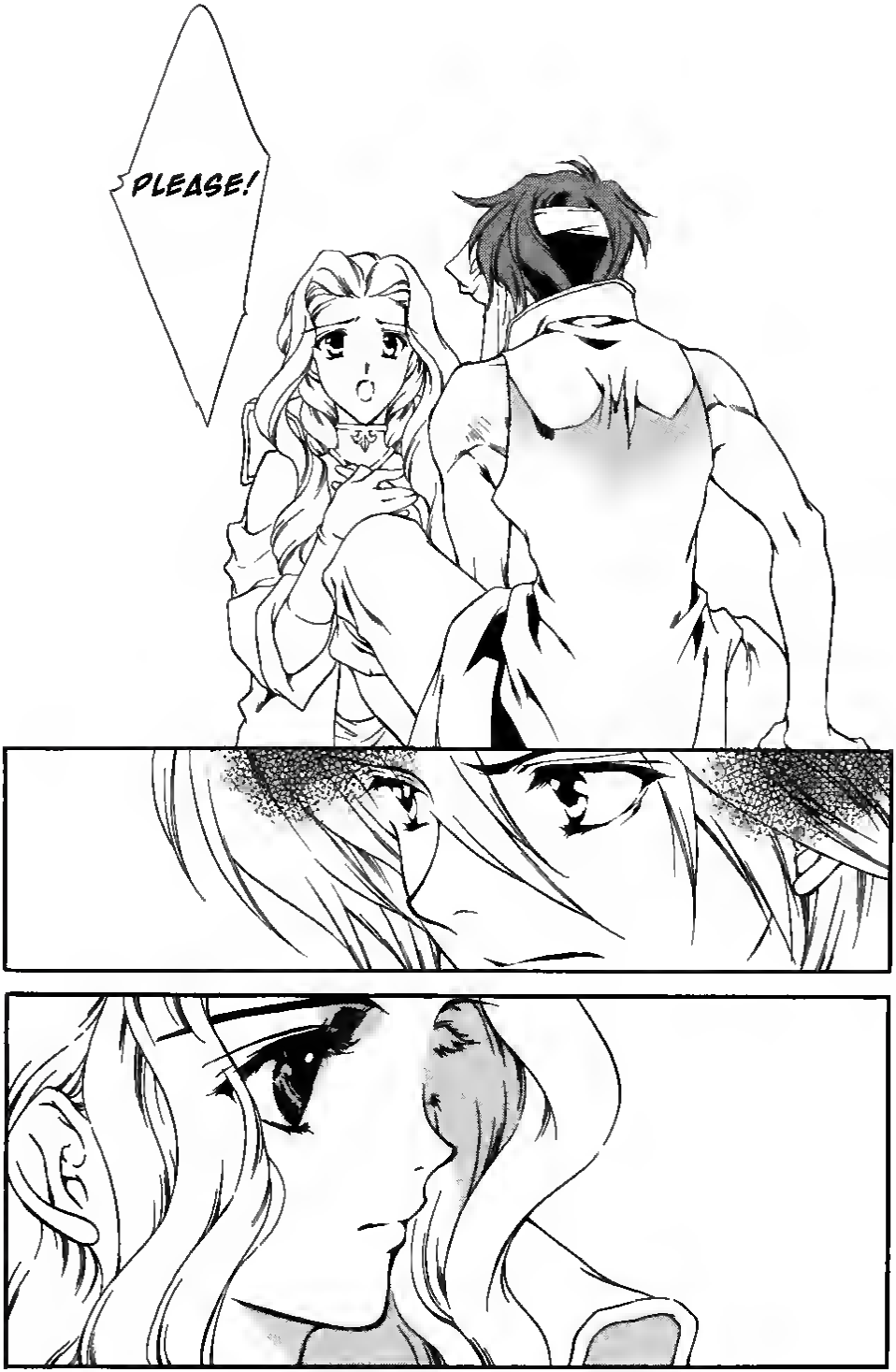
DON'T TRASH MY BAR!
WHILE I WAS TAKING A LITTLE NAP, YOU KNOCKED OUT RUSSELL'S GUARDS AND TOLD HIM SOMETHING HE DIDN'T NEED TO KNOW!
WELL, IT'S A GOOD TIME TO SKIP TOWN.
RUSSELL'S PROBABLY READY TO GO NOW.


LET'S KNOCK DOWN THE PALACE GATE, THE WALLS, ANYTHING WE WANT!
WE'VE GOTTA GIVE THE COURT A LITTLE SCARE TO PAY THEM BACK FOR THEIR KINDNESS.

I'M GOING TOO.
TAKE ME TO THE PALACE, TIGA!
HEY! WHAT'S THAT GIRL DOING HERE?
JUST A BIT MORE.
I WANT TO TELL VINCENT AND CECILIA I'M SAFE.
ARE YOU NUTS?
IT'S TOO DANGEROUS. WAIT HERE.
THAT'S RIGHT, MISS.
WE'LL BRING YOU YOUR FRIENDS.
NO!


TIGA, YOU'RE PLANNING TO GO...
...EVEN THOUGH YOU'RE STILL RECOVERING, RIGHT? THAT'S BECAUSE YOU KNOW THERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU CAN'T LEAVE TO OTHERS.
I'M THE SAME WAY.
I WANT TO USE MY OWN VOICE TO TELL THE PEOPLE WHO'VE WORRIED ABOUT ME THAT I'M OKAY!
I DON'T HAVE ANY-THING...
NO STRENGTH, NO AUTHORITY, NO HEAVENLY GLORY...
... NOTHING.
THERE'S NO BENEFIT FROM STAYING WITH ME.


EVEN SO, THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO STAY BY MY SIDE.
IT'S A MESSAGE FOR PEOPLE WHO'VE RISKED THEIR LIVES FOR ME.
SO I HAVE TO RISK MY LIFE TO SHARE IT.
...I'LL LOSE THEM SOME DAY.
I NEED TO STAY TRUE TO THEM.
IF I JUST REMAIN WHERE IT'S SAFE BECAUSE I'M ONLY THINKING OF MY-SELF...
PLEASE!
TAKE ME TO THE PALACE!


PLEASE!

BUT IF I WAS THEM...
...I'D DO EVERY-THING I COULD FOR YOU...
...EVEN IF YOU DIDN'T PUT YOUR-SELF IN DANGER.
I'D PROBABLY FIND JOY...
...IN KEEPING YOU AS SAFE AS I COULD.
IF I WENT HOME, AND YOU WERE THERE ...
.....
FINE-- YOU WIN.
TH-
THANK YOU!

JUST THAT BY ITSELF ...
IT WOULD BE SO...

MIMI?
THAT'S WHAT I'VE DECIDED TO CALL YOU!
THIS WAY, MIMI!

"MY NAME ...?"
BECAUSE YOU...
"DON'T ASK FOR NOW."
"IT'LL CAUSE LESS TROUBLE FOR YOU IF YOU DON'T KNOW."
"EVEN THINKING ABOUT WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF I DIED..."
...YOU'RE JUST LIKE MY OLD KITTEN--A LITTLE BRAT, WHO LOVED POKING HER NOSE EVERYWHERE.
EVEN IF YOU TELL ME YOUR NAME NOW, I WON'T BOTHER TO LEARN IT.
TO ME, YOU'RE MIMI!

RUS-SELL!
YOU'RE MAKING A LOT OF NOISE, BRAT!
HEY, LITTLE TIGER! HEARD YOU ALMOST GOT YOURSELF KILLED.
DON'T BE SUCH A JERK, OLD MAN. I'M HERE TO GET YOU!
MY LADY?!

I'M SORRY FOR DOING SOMETHING SO CRAZY...
YOU'RE SUCH A FOOL...
WHAT ARE YOU DOING SOMEWHERE SO DANGEROUS?!
I MADE YOU WORRY...
...SO I WANTED TO APOLOGIZE TO YOU, MYSELF.

WE'LL HEAD FOR THE REAR EXIT WHILE THE FIRE DRAWS THEIR ATTEN-TION.
WE CAN'T RELAX YET.
COME, MY LADY!
WAIT, CECILIA!
VINCENT... WHERE'S VINCENT?!

LET'S JUST LEAVE.
LADY VINCENT NEVER CAME BACK.
WHAT HAPPENED?
YOU'RE AWARE, YES?
SHE'S A RELATIVE OF HIGH PRIESTESS MANIEL, WHO IS PLOTTING REBELLION ...
SHE TOLD ME...
...THAT ONCE YOU BEGIN TO DOUBT, A FRIENDSHIP IS OVER

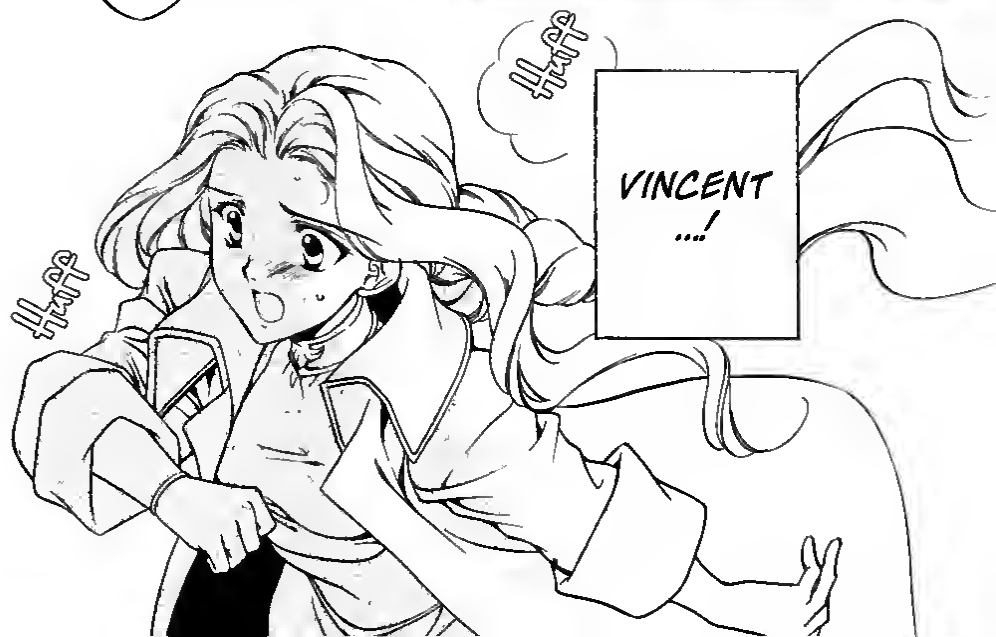
LET US GIVE UP.
IT'S BETTER THIS WAY.
IF VINCENT, HERSELF, HAS ACCEPTED IT...
...HER FATE OF BEING A DAUGHTER OF THE "HOLY HOUSE"...

NO!
RUSSELL, GET THE LADY SOME-WHERE SAFE.
WAIT!
MY LADY!

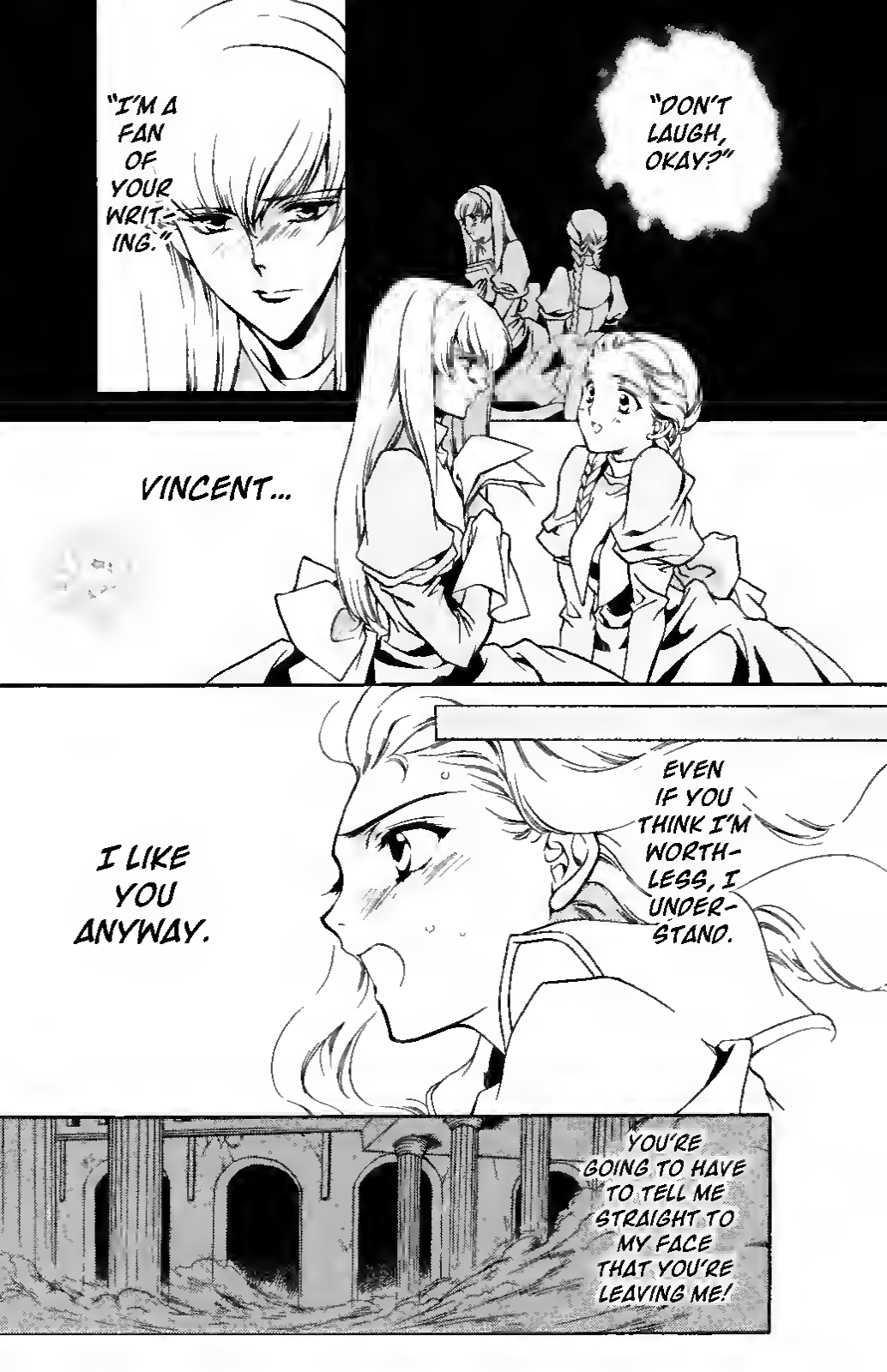
IT WILL BE FINE.
NO...

TIGA!

HE'S SMARTER THAN HE LOOKS.
LET'S BELIEVE IN THE TWO OF THEM...


VINCENT ...!

MY NAME IS EVANGE-LINE. I'LL BE YOUR ROOM-MATE.
I'M VINCENT. NICE TO MEET YOU, EVANGE-LINE.
THE MOST TALENTED AND ELEGANT GIRL IN THE SCHOOL.
EVEN AT TAURUS, EVERYONE LOOKED UP TO VINCENT.
THESE ARE...MY STORIES?

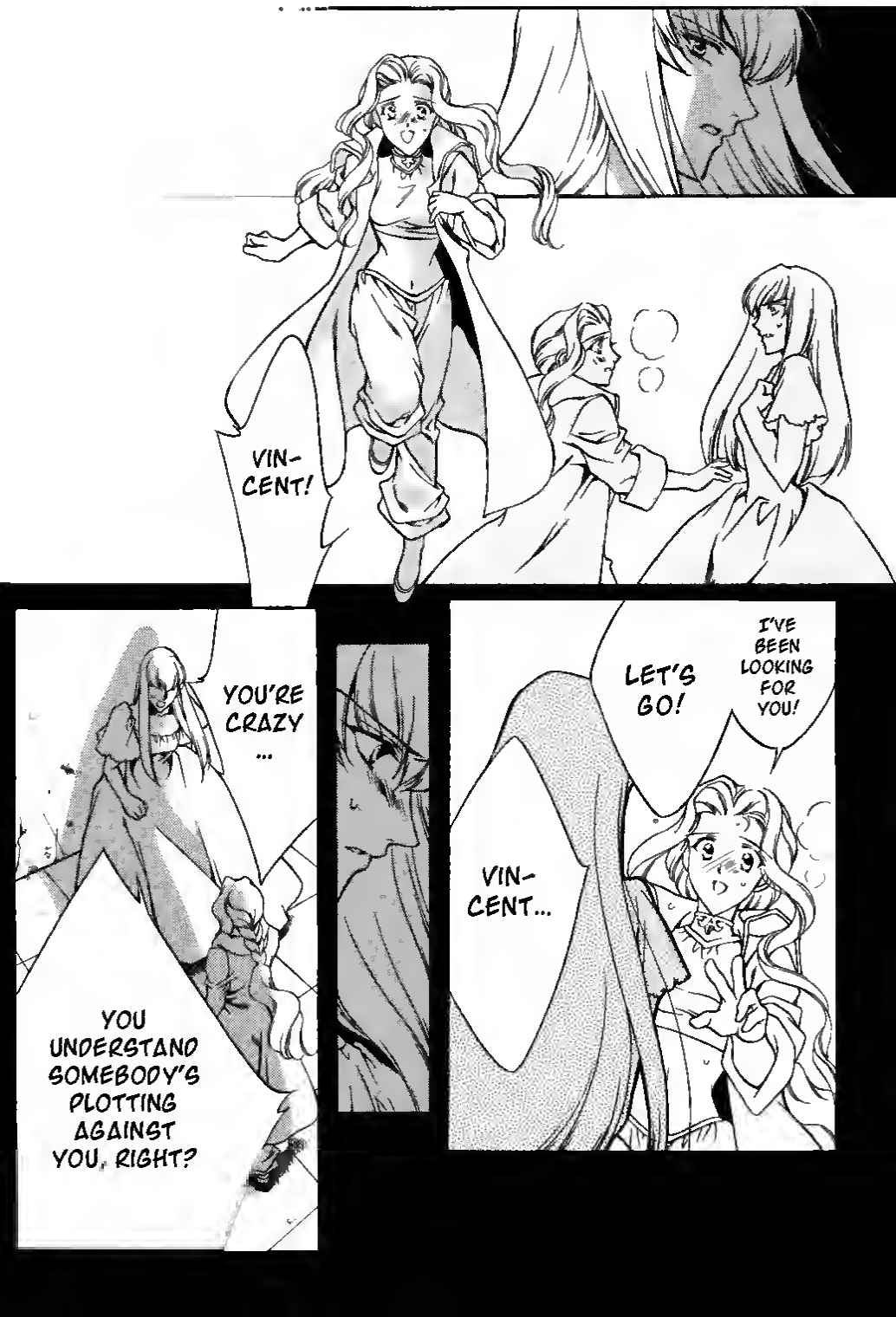

"I'M A FAN OF YOUR WRIT-ING."
"DON'T LAUGH, OKAY?"
VINCENT...
I LIKE YOU ANYWAY.
EVEN IF YOU THINK I'M WORTH-LESS, I UNDER-STAND.
YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO TELL ME STRAIGHT TO MY FACE THAT YOU'RE LEAVING ME!

TIGA!

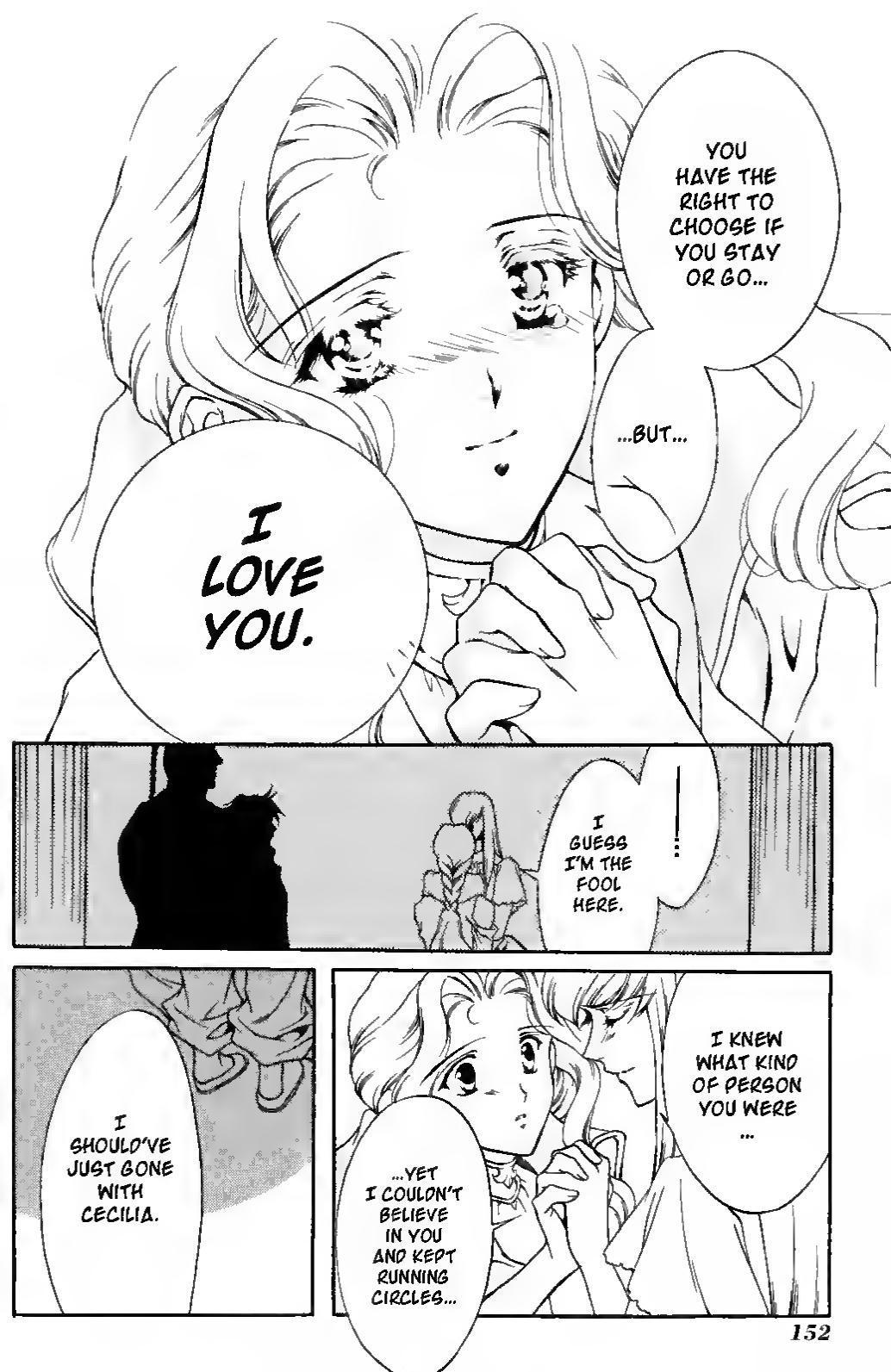
GOGAR!
YOU SHOULD BE EMBAR-RASSED.
SHUT UP!
I LET YOU HAVE HIM.
MISS...
YES?
IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR SOMEONE, YOU SHOULD HURRY.
OUR LITTLE TIGER'S SLOW ON HIS FEET RIGHT NOW. HE WON'T BE MUCH HELP.

I'M SORRY, I...
WHO ARE YOU APOLOGIZING TO?
HUH?
TIGA...
AND I THINK HE KNOWS IT.
HE'S NOT SHOWING IT...
YOU NEED TO FIND THIS VIN GUY, RIGHT?
BUT HE'S JUST GOTTEN OUT OF BED...AND HIS RIGHT ARM'S HURT.
GUY ...?
ALL THAT STUFF ABOUT BEING TRUE TO SOMEONE... YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT A GIRL?
YOU'RE KIDDING!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN? VINCENT'S A GIRL.
WHAT?!

CAN I NOT SAY THAT TO ANOTHER GIRL?
NO... WELL... YOU CAN.
AT A TIME LIKE THIS...
VIN-CENT!


VIN-
CENT!
YOU'RE CRAZY ...
YOU UNDERSTAND SOMEBODY'S PLOTTING AGAINST YOU, RIGHT?
VIN-
CENT...
LET'S GO!
I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU!

I'M RELATED TO THE PERSON WHO IS TRYING TO KILL YOU!
I'VE NEVER HAD ANY REAL RELATIVES...
HONESTLY... I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW THAT MATTERS.
MY REAL SISTER IS MY WORST ENEMY.
I WAS RAISED IN A STRANGER'S HOUSE.
MY PARENTS AND "RELATIVES" WEREN'T RELATED TO ME BY BLOOD.
...IS TO FIND SOMEONE I THINK I CAN LIKE AND TRUST, AND BELIEVE IN THEM AS HARD AS I CAN...
ALL I CAN DO...
THAT'S WHY...
NO MATTER WHO BETRAYED ME OR WHO KILLED ME, IT WOULDN'T SURPRISE ME.

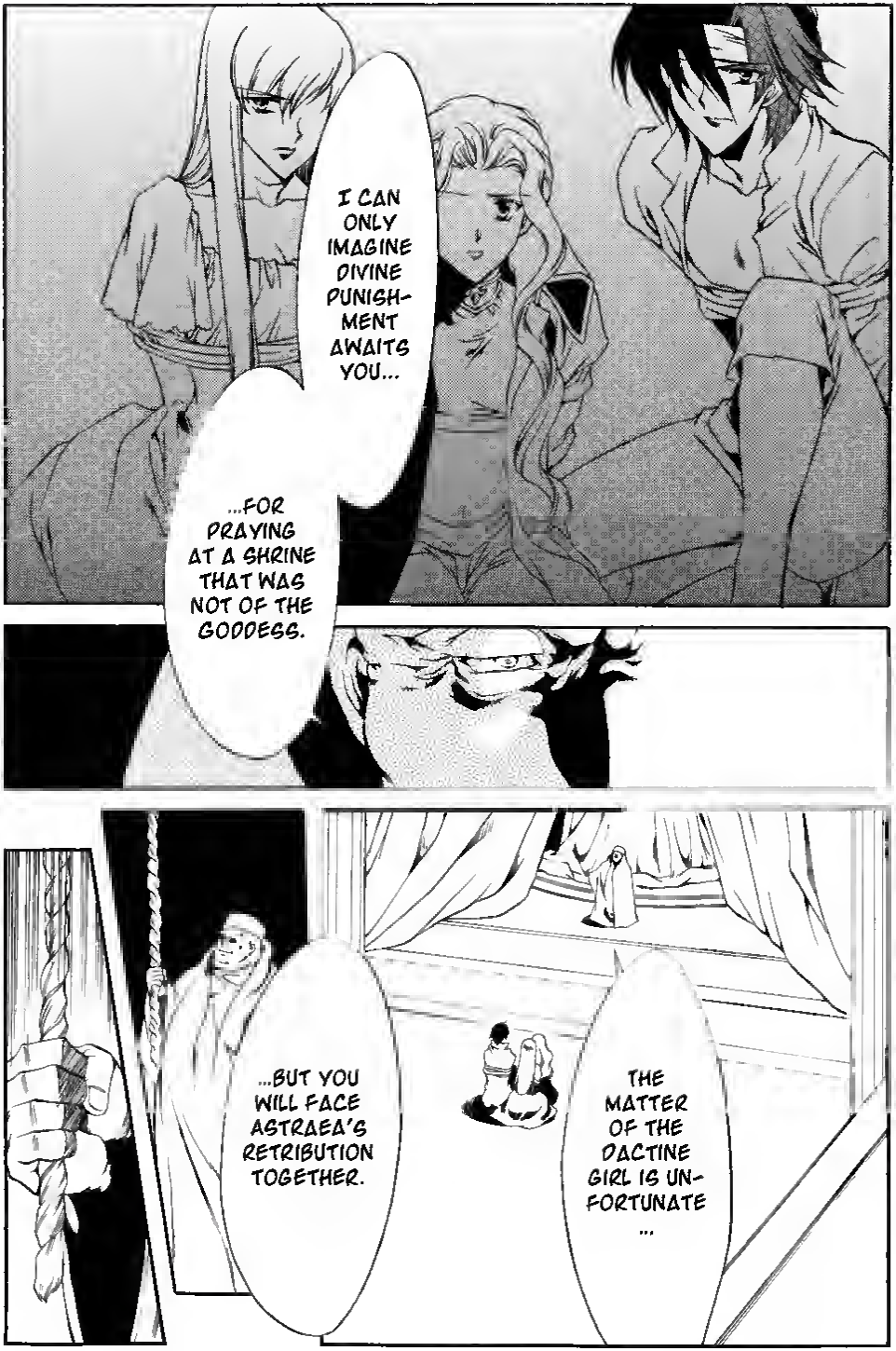

I LOVE YOU.
YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE IF YOU STAY OR GO...
...BUT...
I GUESS I'M THE FOOL HERE.
!!
I SHOULD'VE JUST GONE WITH CECILIA.
I KNEW WHAT KIND OF PERSON YOU WERE ...
...YET I COULDN'T BELIEVE IN YOU AND KEPT RUNNING CIRCLES...

I WAS LOOKING FOR THIS IN THE HIGH PRIEST'S ROOM.
I TOLD MYSELF ...
...UNLESS I HAD SOMETHING TO PROVE I WASN'T ONE OF THEM, YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE IN ME.
THIS IS THE HIGH PRIEST'S ORDER TO ASSASSINATE YOU.
FROM HIGH PRIESTESS MANIEL?!
THIS IS AMAZING, VINCENT!
IN THE BIG BOSS'S HAND-WRITING ...?
YOU'RE A SMART GIRL.
WHO'S HE?
THE EZRET WHO TOOK ME IN.
I CAN USE THIS TO ACCUSE THE HIGH PRIESTESS AT THE COURT!
THAT'S ENOUGH, LADIES.

GIVE THAT TO ME, PLEASE.

DON'T STRUGGLE!
THEIR BLADES CAN KILL YOU WITH A TOUCH!
I GUESS YOU TRULY ARE A QUEEN-IN-WAITING. YOU SEE THINGS AS THEY REALLY ARE.
QUEEN-IN-WAITING...?
YOU WON'T GET AWAY WITH THIS, HIGH PRIEST MELIADES. YOU KNEW WHO I WAS WHEN YOU PLANNED THIS.
IF WE DON'T HAVE THAT NOTE, THE CRIME WILL BE ON YOUR HEAD ALONE.
DO YOU THINK YOU'RE THREATENING ME?
MY PRETTY LITTLE PRINCESS...

AND YOU, YOURSELF, MADE THIS POSSIBLE.
A SERVANT GIRL DIES IN A DISTANT DESERT COUNTRY? WHO WILL KNOW OR CARE?
IF THEY FIND OUT I WAS KILLED HERE, ROLAND WILL ACT.
YOU'RE LOSING YOUR COMPOSURE.
THE LORELAIN MONASTERY AND THE HIGH PRIESTS ARE THE MOST LOYAL SERVANTS OF THE QUEEN.
AND THE FIRST PEOPLE THEY'LL LOOK FOR WILL BE THE LORELAIN, WHO'VE BEEN GETTING OUT OF HAND IN THE EAST.

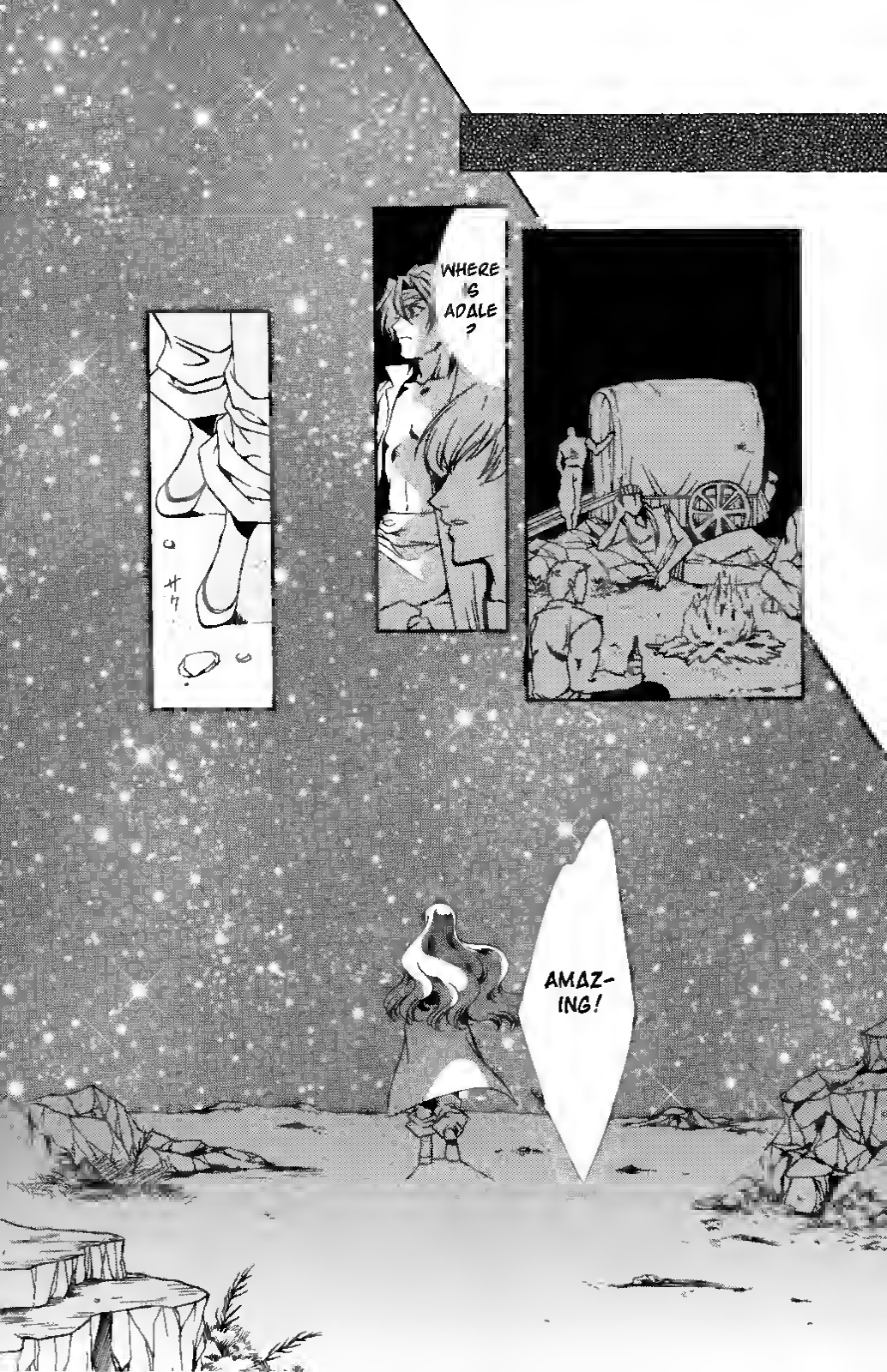

I CAN ONLY IMAGINE DIVINE PUNISH-MENT AWAITS YOU...
...FOR PRAYING AT A SHRINE THAT WAS NOT OF THE GODDESS.
...BUT YOU WILL FACE ASTRAEA'S RETRIBUTION TOGETHER.
THE MATTER OF THE DACTINE GIRL IS UN-FORTUNATE ...

THE GODDESS SHALL JUDGE!
...AND WHICH IS THINKING OF THE FUTURE OF GRAAL?
WHICH IS THE TRAI-TOR...
ズズ
パラパラ

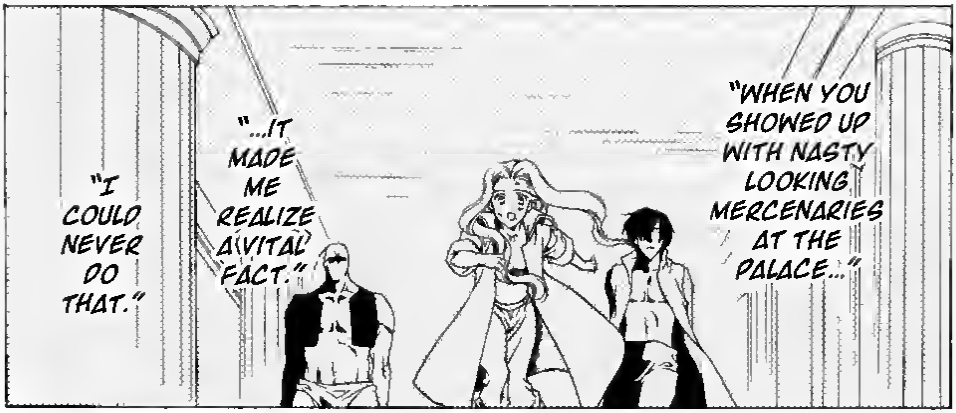
GOGAR!
HURRY!
GLORY TO HIGH PRIEST-ESS MANIEL!

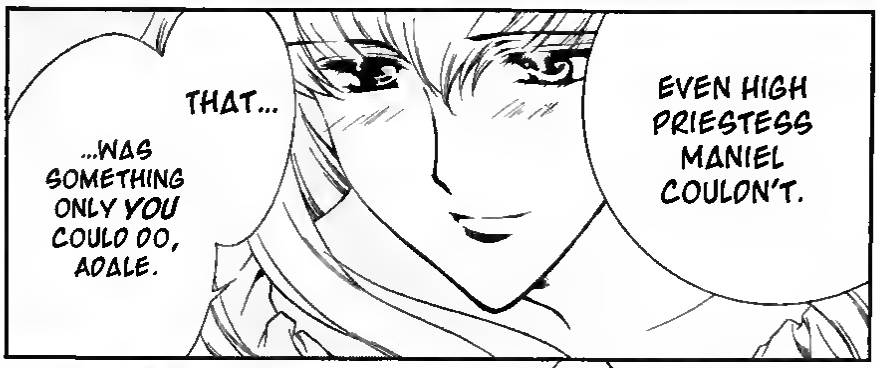
MIMI, COME THIS WAY!

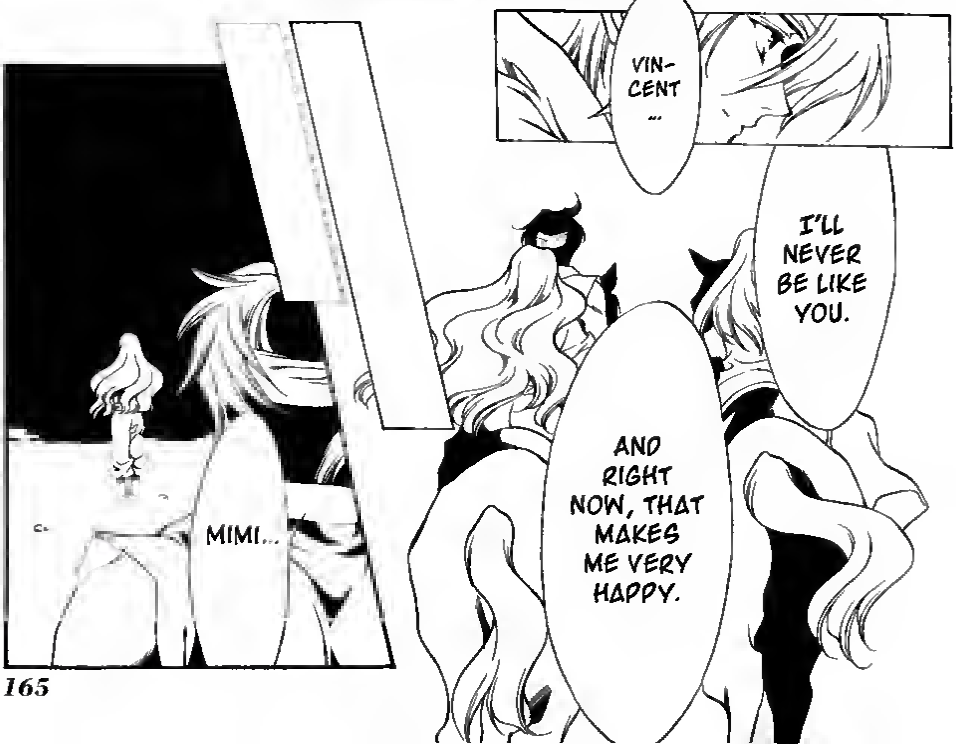
HOW MANY TIMES HAS IT BEEN NOW? YOU'RE CRAZY, KID.
I WANT A QUIET LIFE, AND YOU KEEP RUINING IT!
MAYBE YOU'LL OPEN A SHOP IN TOLMARINE THIS TIME ?!
SO HOT AND SO FIERCE ...
EVEN WHEN DANGER IS AT HAND...
...HE LIVES HIS LIFE TRUE TO HIM-SELF.
AND I LIVE TOO ...


WHERE IS ADALE?
AMAZ-ING!

THERE ARE MORE STARS ...
...THAN I COULD EVER SEE IN HIERA-GLION.
IT'S LIKE THEY'RE SPEAK-ING TO ME.
ADALE, I...
I THINK I'VE LEARNED A LITTLE ABOUT THE QUEEN-SHIP.
YOU'RE A QUEEN-IN-WAITING AND I'M NOT.
THE DIF-FERENCE BETWEEN US...
EVEN THEIR ENEMIES WILL FIND THEMSELVES OFFERING HELP
...THE REASON THE QUEENS-IN-WAITING AREN'T GIVEN A FAMILY ...
...IS PROBABLY BECAUSE, IF THEY DON'T HAVE ANY-THING...
GIRLS LIKE THAT ARE THE BEST SUITED TO BE QUEEN.
... EVERYONE WILL WANT TO LEND THEM A HAND.

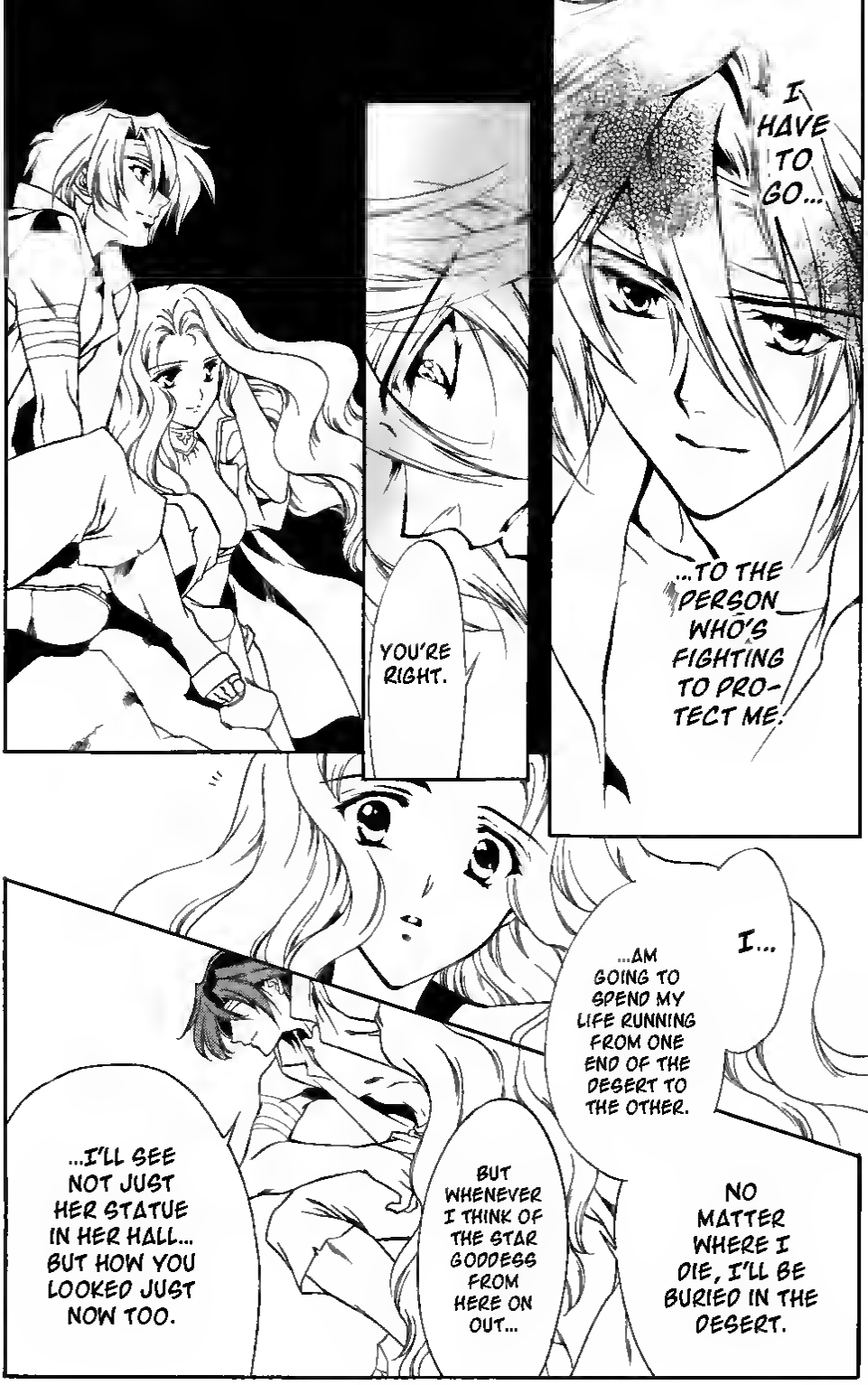

"I COULD NEVER DO THAT."
"...IT MADE ME REALIZE A VITAL FACT."
"WHEN YOU SHOWED UP WITH NASTY LOOKING MERCENARIES AT THE PALACE..."


THAT...
...WAS SOMETHING ONLY YOU COULD DO, ADALE.
EVEN HIGH PRIESTESS MANIEL COULDN'T.

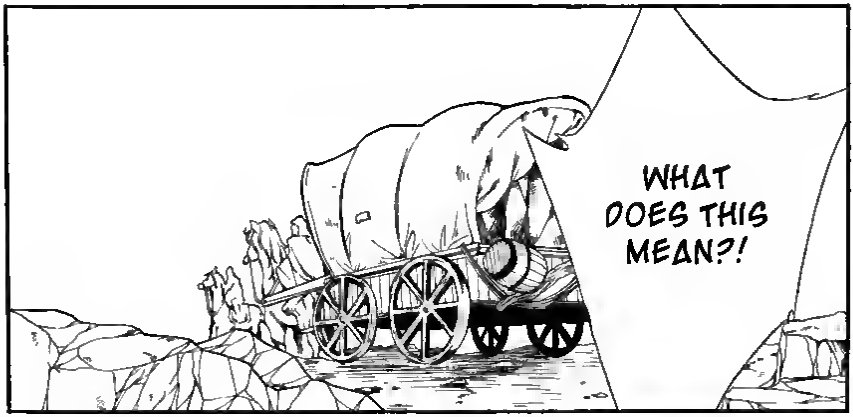

VIN-CENT...
I'LL NEVER BE LIKE YOU.
AND RIGHT NOW, THAT MAKES ME VERY HAPPY.
MIMI...

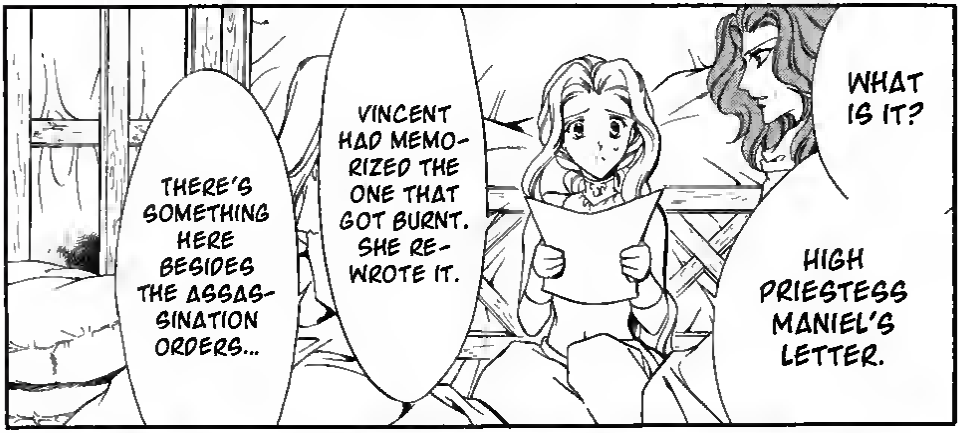
I WAS JUST LOOKING. THE STARS ARE AMAZING.
Tee-hee
HUNH?
NO...
WERE YOU PRAYING?
IT SEEMED LIKE I COULD FEEL THEM.
...WE CAN'T TOUCH THE LIGHT OF THE STARS.
...EVEN IF WE'VE FOULED THE WORLD SO MUCH IT EVEN TAINTS OUR FAITH...
EVEN IF WE'VE MADE THE LAND UGLY WITH BETRAYAL, HYPOCRISY, AND BLOODLETTING...
YOU FIGURED IT OUT, HUH?
YES.
THANK YOU, TIGA.
NO...
YOU'RE ACTUALLY RUSSELL EZRET, AREN'T YOU?

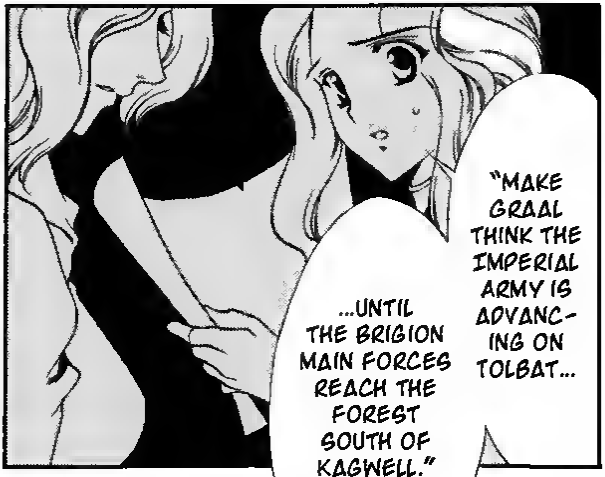
GROWING UP, I WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO BE ABLE TO LOOK AWAY FROM IT.
THERE WERE OTHERS WHO DID THE FIGHTING FOR ME.
I DIDN'T WANT TO THINK ABOUT IT.
I WAS ...
...ALWAYS AVERTING MY EYES FROM IT ...
...FROM THE FACT THAT LIVING MEANS RISKING YOUR LIFE TO FIGHT.
WHEN I MET YOU, I LEARNED WHAT LIVING AND FIGHTING MEANT.
I'M A FOOL.
ONCE YOU'RE DEAD, THAT'S THE END OF IT.
SO I CAN'T LET MY LORD BROTHER EUGIS DIE, NO MATTER WHAT.
AND...
...I CAN'T LET MYSELF DIE UNTIL I SEE HIM AGAIN.

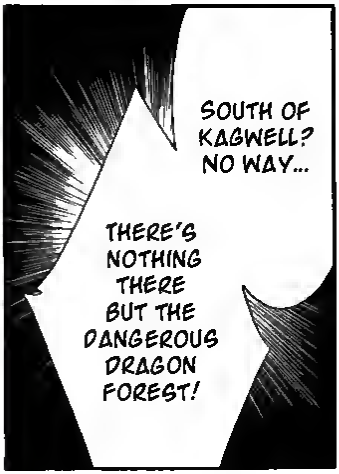

I HAVE TO GO...
...TO THE PERSON WHO'S FIGHTING TO PROTECT ME.
YOU'RE RIGHT.
I...
...AM GOING TO SPEND MY LIFE RUNNING FROM ONE END OF THE DESERT TO THE OTHER.
NO MATTER WHERE I DIE, I'LL BE BURIED IN THE DESERT.
BUT WHENEVER I THINK OF THE STAR GODDESS FROM HERE ON OUT...
...I'LL SEE NOT JUST HER STATUE IN HER HALL... BUT HOW YOU LOOKED JUST NOW TOO.

A GIRL STANDING BENEATH A STARRY SKY...
FOREVER, PROBABLY.


WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?!


WHAT IS IT?
HIGH PRIESTESS MANIEL'S LETTER.
VINCENT HAD MEMORIZED THE ONE THAT GOT BURNT. SHE REWROTE IT.
THERE'S SOMETHING HERE BESIDES THE ASSASSINATION ORDERS...


"MAKE GRAAL THINK THE IMPERIAL ARMY IS ADVANCING ON TOLBAT...
...UNTIL THE BRIGION MAIN FORCES REACH THE FOREST SOUTH OF KAGWELL."

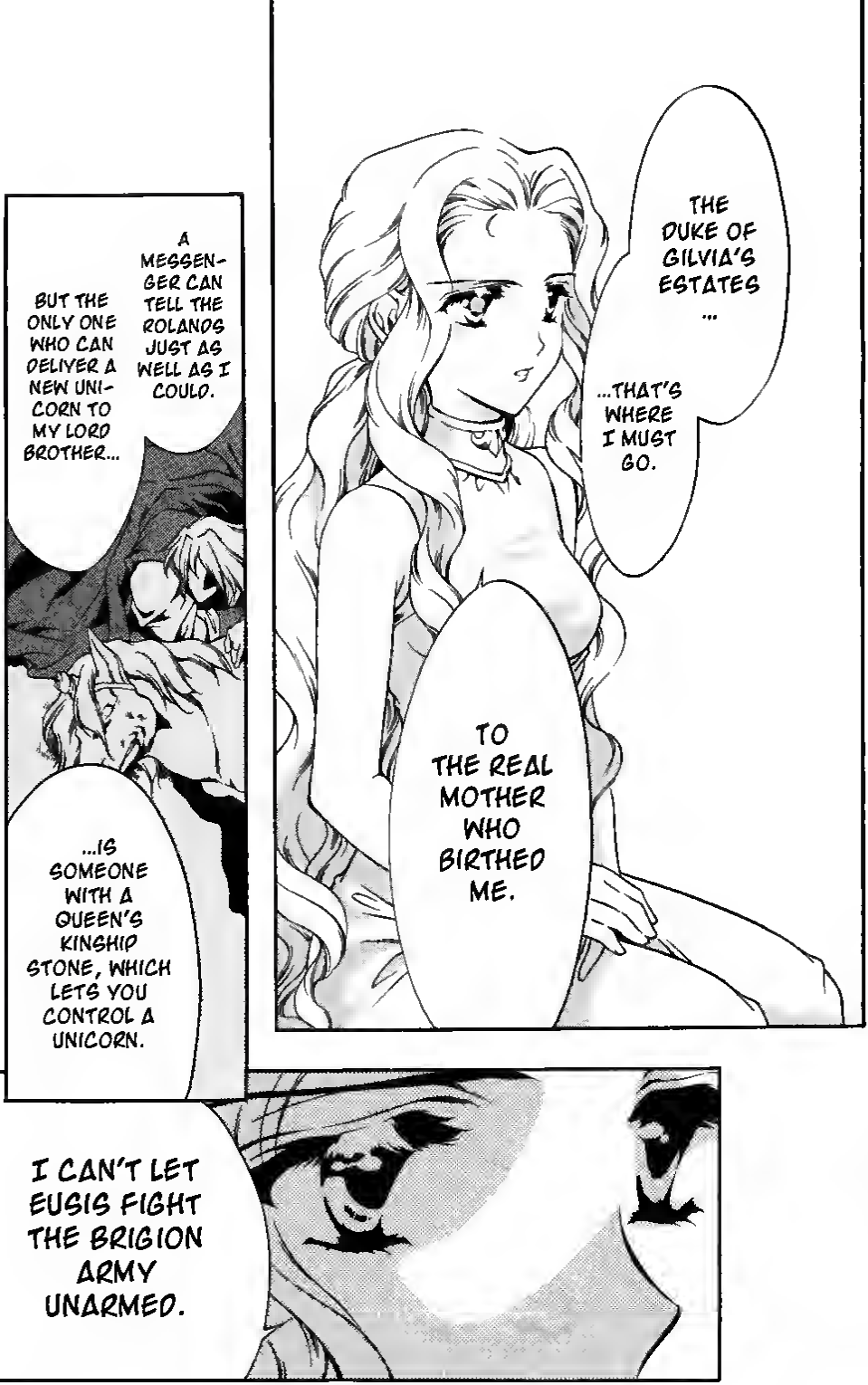

SOUTH OF KAGWELL? NO WAY...
THERE'S NOTHING THERE BUT THE DANGEROUS DRAGON FOREST!

LEANDRA'S ARMY IS SOUTH OF KAGWELL!
SHE'S BEEN LAYING A TRAP FOR LEANDRA THIS WHOLE TIME?
!
...BUT IF HIGH PRIESTESS MANIEL IS AWARE, I KNOW WHAT SHE'S THINKING.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE IMPERIAL ARMY IS REALLY AFTER...
TIGA SAID THE IMPERIAL ARMY WAS HEADING SOUTH.
I THINK I KNOW.
WHAT WOULD BE THE POINT OF THAT?!
"MAKE GRAAL THINK BRIGION IS ADVANCING ON TOLBAT" ...?

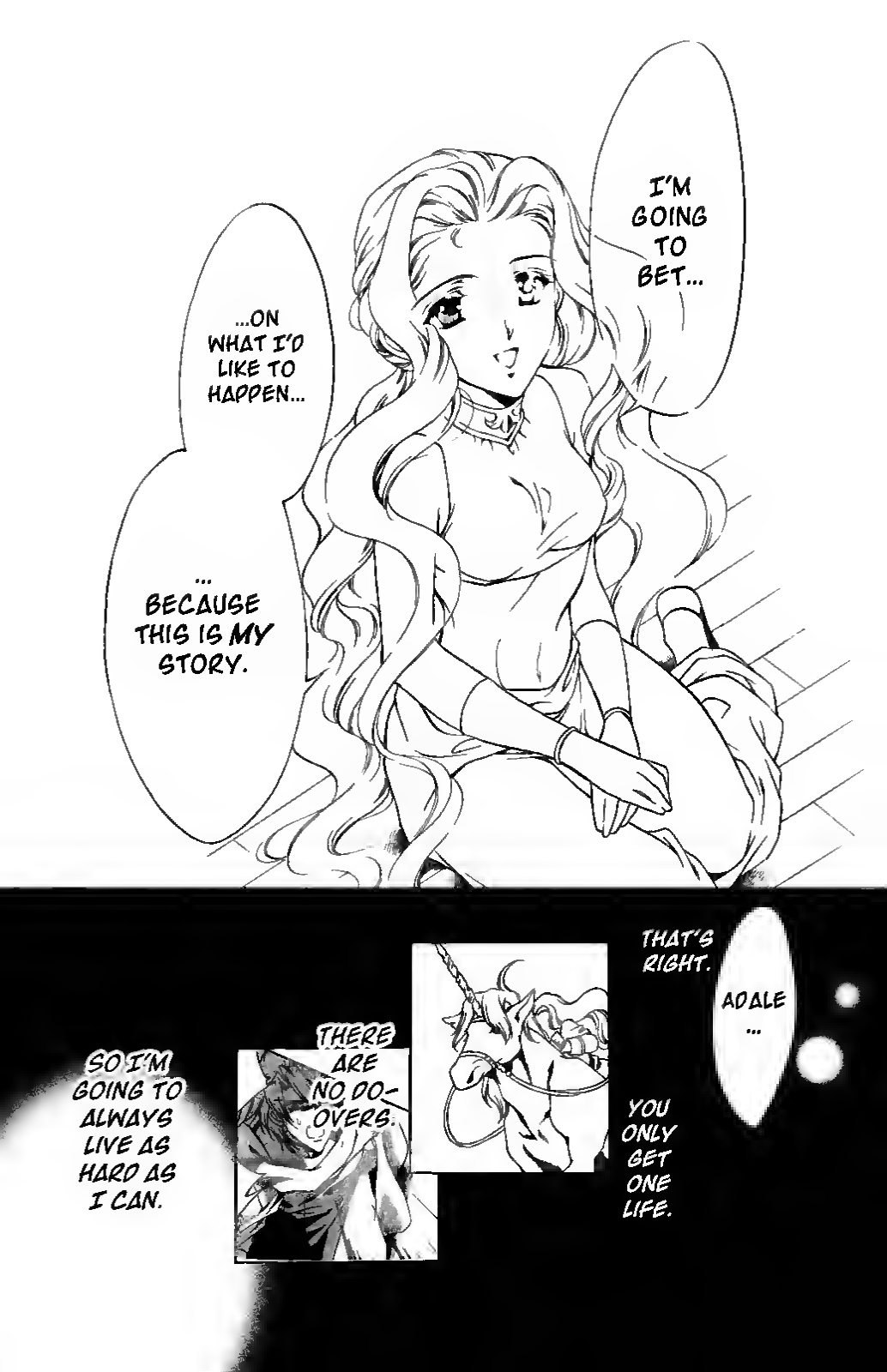
THAT IS WHAT THE HIGH PRIESTESS WAS AFTER!
KNOWING LEANDRA, IF SHE SAW A BRIGION ARMY...
...SHE WOULD ATTACK IT WITH THE AMBITION OF GAINING GLORY.
THE CONSERVATIVES WOULD BE UPSET, AND THE HIGH PRIESTESS, WITH HER TRADITIONS OF NONVIOLENCE, WOULD IMMEDIATELY WIN PUBLIC SUPPORT.
IF I DIED IN TOLBAT ...
...THE ONLY REMAINING QUEEN-IN-WAITING WOULD BE LEANDRA.

KILLED BY HIGH PRIESTESS MANIEL ?!
IT WAS ALL A FAKE ?!
NO... THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN THAT. IT'S ENTIRELY POSSIBLE ...
...THE TASK OF STOPPING BRIGION'S INVASION... THE FIRE-BIRD'S FEATHER, ITSELF...
BUT IF MANIEL CONCOCTED THIS SCHEME, THEN...
NO!
YES.
THE QUEEN MAY HAVE BEEN...
I HATE TO SAY IT, BUT IT'S VERY POSSIBLE.
THE TEMPTATION OF THE THRONE IS JUST TOO GREAT.
IF I WAS IN HER POSITION, I MIGHT'VE DONE THE SAME THING.
IF ADALE WASN'T HERE...
THIS IS HORRIBLE!

LADY MARGOT WOULD KNOW JUST WHAT TO DO.
THE ROLANDS!
WE MUST LET THE HOUSE OF ROLAND KNOW AT ONCE!
NO...
THERE'S NO TIME.
WHEN I WENT TO THE TOLMARINE BORDER WITH THE EZRETS, I HEARD RUMORS OF MY LORD BROTHER...OF THE DRAGON KNIGHTS.
THE DRAGON KNIGHTS HAVE ALREADY MET UP WITH LEANDRA AND ARE FIGHTING THE MEAT-EATER DRAGONS IN KAGWELL.
EUSIS'S UNICORN HAS BEEN KILLED.


THE DUKE OF GILVIA'S ESTATES ...
...THAT'S WHERE I MUST GO.
TO THE REAL MOTHER WHO BIRTHED ME.
A MESSENGER CAN TELL THE ROLANDS JUST AS WELL AS I COULD.
BUT THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN DELIVER A NEW UNICORN TO MY LORD BROTHER...
...IS SOMEONE WITH A QUEEN'S KINSHIP STONE, WHICH LETS YOU CONTROL A UNICORN.
I CAN'T LET EUSIS FIGHT THE BRIGION ARMY UNARMED.

NOW IT'S MY TURN TO PROTECT YOU, MY LORD BROTHER.
I'LL MEET THE DUCHESS OF GILVIA, PRINCESS AUGUSTA ...
...AND I'LL GET ANOTHER UNICORN.
BUT IF YOU GO...
...AND SEE YOUR REAL MOTHER, YOU MAY UPSET LADY ROLAND.
WILL YOU BE ALL RIGHT WITH THAT ...?
I HAVE DECIDED TO...
...HAVE FAITH IN MY STEP-MOTHER IN RUALGO.
SHE AND THE MOTHER WHO LET ME GO...BOTH ARE MY REAL MOTHERS TO ME.


I'M GOING TO BET...
...ON WHAT I'D LIKE TO HAPPEN...
... BECAUSE THIS IS MY STORY.
ADALE ...
THAT'S RIGHT.
YOU ONLY GET ONE LIFE.
THERE ARE NO DO-OVERS.
SO I'M GOING TO ALWAYS LIVE AS HARD AS I CAN.

I WON'T RUN ANY-MORE.
I WON'T LOOK AWAY.
MY LOVE AND MY FREEDOM AREN'T GOING TO BE FOUND BY USING PENS AND PAPER.

I'M GOING TO CREATE THEM MY-SELF!
TIGA...
THAT'S SOME-THING YOU TAUGHT ME.

"TIGA, THERE'S SOMETHING I WANT TO ASK YOU BEFORE I GO."
"DO YOU HAVE A BROTH-ER?"
"I KNOW SOMEONE WHO LOOKS JUST LIKE YOU."

AS THEY FADED FROM LIVING MEMORY, THEIR STORIES WERE BORN ANEW.
SHINING EVEN BRIGHTER THAN THEY EVER DID...
...THEIR LEGACIES ENDURED, PASSING ON THEIR MAJESTY AND COURAGE TO THE FUTURE.

Thank you so much!

From Momokawa Haruhiko, who missed an entire lifetime's worth of deadlines on this side story alone.

I'm sorry.
I'm so sorry.